

**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
PEST OF THE MONTH PROGRAM NO. 37**

## **CATS ON DISTRICT PROPERTY**

Cats have been present on Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) properties for a long time and have gradually escalated to a point where they are now a serious concern. The increase in cat populations and problems is not unique to LAUSD, but is reflective of what is going on in society with respect to cat numbers and nuisances.

### **Definitions of Types of Cats**

- What is a feral cat? A feral cat is an animal that is too poorly socialized to be handled (and therefore must be trapped or sedated for examination) and which cannot be placed into a typical pet home.
- Any cat that is not confined to a house or another enclosure is *free-roaming*. Free-roaming cats often cause much of the cat-related problems in a given area.
- An *abandoned cat* is an animal that may be tame, but does not currently have an owner and is free-roaming.
- *Stray cats* are currently or recently owned animals that may be lost from their homes. They were well socialized initially, but over time may become feral.

There are more than 77 million pet cats in the United States. A 1997 nationwide poll showed that only 5% are kept exclusively indoors, leaving the majority of owned cats free to kill birds and other wildlife at least some of the time. Many cats are abandoned by their owners or lost (stray), or descendants of strays and living in the wild (feral). These cats are victims of human irresponsibility due to abandonment and failure to spay or neuter pets. No one knows how many homeless cats are in the United States, but estimates range from 60 to 100 million. These cats lead short, miserable lives. The demographics of Los Angeles County and the attitude towards pet animals likewise have changed. Free-roaming pets are common everywhere in the city and their presence is generally tolerated.

Feral and free-roaming domestic cats have three basic requirements for survival – food, water, and shelter. If one or more of these life essentials is not present on school properties, cats will simply go elsewhere to find them.

### **General Hazards to Free-Roaming and Feral Cats**

- **Road vehicles** kill millions of cats each year in the United States and maim countless others.
- **Poisoning** from contacting pesticides on lawns and from secondary poisoning by rodenticides. Cats also die from drinking antifreeze that leaked from cars on driveways and roads.
- **Other Animals.** Outdoor cats can be killed or injured by free-roaming dogs, coyotes, wildlife, and other cats.

- **Human Abuse.** Animal care and control agencies report cases of cats being burned, injured, or otherwise hurt and abused by people.
- **Traps.** Cats caught in traps set for other animals may suffer for days before release or starvation.
- **Overpopulation.** Outdoor cats that are not spayed or neutered are major sources of the cat overpopulation problem, causing millions of unwanted cats to be euthanized at animal shelters each year.

### **Why should LAUSD be concerned about cats on its properties?**

Domestic cats and wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, opossums, coyotes, ground and tree squirrels, etc., pose a public health and safety hazard to people, property, and the environment. Zoonoses are diseases of animals which can be transmitted to humans by direct contact with infected animals, their excrement, or by arthropod vectors (mites, fleas, ticks) that live on animals. The causative organisms of these diseases span the spectrum of viruses, bacteria, fungi, and parasites. Some examples of these diseases are summarized on Attachment A, together with information regarding their potential impact to humans. In addition, cats pose threats to birds and other wildlife both as predators and through the transmission of diseases (See Attachment B).

From the information reported above and in Attachments A & B, it should be clear to any reasonable and responsible person that cats on district campuses pose specific and potentially serious health and safety hazards for students, employees, volunteers, contractors, parents, and visitors. Cats, their feces, allergens, urine, hairs, regurgitation, carcasses, dead prey animals, associated odors, and ectoparasites such as fleas, ticks, and mites pose serious health threats to humans. At schools, where there is a daily, dense concentration of young children, faculty, staff, parents and other community people, the health and safety threats from cats are greatly magnified. Students can be bitten or scratched by cats, with possible transmission of disease possible. Cats also are a major cause of flea infestations on campuses.

### **Challenges that District Pest Management Staff Encounter with Cats**

District Pest Management staff routinely encounters the following challenges in dealing with cats on our campuses:

- Site-based school employees are putting out food and water for cats, thus encouraging them to take up residence at schools.
- Site-based school employees are interfering with the department's efforts to trap and remove cats from schools by removing, vandalizing, tampering with, and springing live cat traps set out to humanely retrieve problem cats. It has become necessary to chain down and padlock cat traps in order to prevent them from being removed.
- Site-based school employees may be aware of members of the public who are abandoning cats on school property, but they are not reporting the illegal activities of these people.
- Site-based school employees may be aware of members of the public who are putting out food for cats on or around school property, but they are not reporting them.

- Site-based school employees have a mistaken belief that cats control rodents at schools and thus they are beneficial. Nothing could be further from the truth. The health threats from cats on and in school properties far outweigh any marginal rodent control benefit they may possibly provide.
- Site-based school employees often are unable or unwilling to see or understand the connection between the presence of cats and other wildlife on school grounds and the outbreak of fleas.
- At one school, pest management staff was informed that a district employee at the site was actually kicking in the vent screens on raised foundation structures so that cats could find shelter under the structures.
- Plant managers do not always identify potential cat entry points into and under structures and promptly place work order calls to have them repaired.
- Dumpsters with absent, poor-fitting, or broken lids are often present on campuses. Dumpster lids must be kept closed at all times when not in use to exclude rodents and cats. Dumpsters with broken, damaged, or malfunctioning lids must be called in for replacement.
- Areas under and around dumpsters are not always adequately maintained and cleaned routinely so as to ensure that food scraps are not available to undesirable pestiferous animals.
- In general, many people believe that cats are just cute, harmless pets and there is no need to restrict their activities. Most people are not aware of the health and safety hazards posed by cats.

### **Pest Management Staff Efforts to Control Cats on Campuses**

Currently, District pest management technicians trap cats on district properties in the most humane manner possible and take them to the City of Los Angeles Department of Animal Services which has been working with District staff regarding our cat and nuisance wildlife problems. There are limitations to what the City of Los Angeles, Department of Animal Services will handle. For example, they will not accept a cat that has a tag on it. District pest management staff is told to release tagged cats at the sites where they were trapped. The City of Los Angeles, Department of Animal Services is currently overburdened with unwanted and abandoned animals. In 2007, they were forced to euthanize 8,960 cats and 6,049 dogs at a cost to taxpayers of two million dollars.

### **What Staff Can Do to Avoid Cat/Fleas Problems on Campuses**

The District's first line of defense against cats frequenting and/or taking up residence on its properties is to deny them access to food, water, and harborage. Everyone has a responsibility to see to it that his/her activities do not contribute to attracting cats and other unwanted nuisance wildlife to school property. Good sanitation practices and daily professional trash handling procedures are important deterrents to pest animals.

Site administrators should educate students, faculty, staff, and other people regarding health and safety issues relevant to cat problems, particularly at schools. Administrators should:

- Prohibit school employees and members of the community from putting out food and water for cats, thus encouraging them to take up residence at schools. Such actions are prohibited under Section 53.06.5 of the Los Angeles Municipal Code (Amended by Ord. No. 175383, Eff. 9/14/03). Any person violating this subsection is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of not more than \$1,000.00 or by imprisonment in the County Jail for a period of not more than six months, or by both a fine and imprisonment.
- Prohibit site-based school employees from removing, vandalizing, tampering with, and springing live cat traps set out to humanely retrieve problem cats and prohibit them from providing cats access to harborage (e.g., removing vent covers, etc.).
- Report to site administrators and/or appropriate authorities people who are feeding or abandoning cats on District property or are providing cats access to harborage on school property.
- Ensure that Plant Managers routinely walk their campuses to identify potential cat entry points into and under structures and promptly place work order calls to have these repaired.
- Ensure that dumpsters with absent, poor-fitting, or broken lids are promptly replaced. Dumpster lids must be kept closed at all times when not in use to exclude rodents and cats.
- Ensure that areas under and around dumpsters are adequately maintained and cleaned routinely so as to ensure that food scraps are not available to undesirable pestiferous animals.

District craftspeople, contractors, and other tradespersons must ensure that openings which could permit animals to enter attics and substructural areas of buildings are closed after completing work on District structures.

## **References and Other Useful Sources of Information on this Subject**

Slater, M.R. 2002. Community Approaches to Feral Cats: Problems, Alternatives, and Recommendations United States Humane Society Press, Washington, DC. 144 pp. This book can be accessed at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)

Domestic Cat Predation in California, Florida and Hawaii – A resource for Educators and Activists. <http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/states/index.html>

The Great Outdoors is no Place for Cats. [www.abcbirds.org/cats](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats)

Domestic Cat Predation on Birds and Other Wildlife. [www.abcbirds.org/cats](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats)

Cats and Wildlife. [http://www.audubonportland.org/livingwithwildlife/brochures/cats\\_wildlife](http://www.audubonportland.org/livingwithwildlife/brochures/cats_wildlife)

Assembly Bill 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act of 2008. [www.cahealthypets.com](http://www.cahealthypets.com)

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## CAT-RELATED DISEASES

## Attachment A

- **Rabies** is caused by a virus that can infect warm-blooded animals, including cats, people, wildlife, and farm animals. Rabies is lethal if not detected and treated immediately. A recent case of rabies was reported from Los Angeles County that was associated with ground squirrels in a city park. Today more cats than dogs succumb to rabies, with 249 cases of feline rabies confirmed in 2000, not including undocumented cases of stray and feral cats which also fall victim to the disease.
- **Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)** compromises a cat's immune system and is the leading cause of death due to infectious disease in cats. There is no cure for this disease. FeLV has also been diagnosed in a mountain lion.
- **Feline Panleukopenia (FPV)** (feline distemper) is extremely contagious. FPV disarms a cat's immune system. It is fatal without intensive medical treatment. FPV has also been diagnosed in the endangered Florida panther.
- **Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FPI)** is a debilitating and fatal viral disease. No cure exists. FPI has also been diagnosed in jaguars, mountain lions, and lynxes.
- **Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)** destroys a cat immune system and is often fatal. It is found mostly in unneutered, free-roaming males. No vaccine or cure is available. FIV has also been found in bobcats and in the endangered Florida panther.
- **Feline Viral Rhinotracheitis and Feline Calicivirus** are extremely contagious, with death occurring most often in very young or older cats.
- **Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)** are highly contagious and common illnesses in felines, especially young kittens. Symptoms include sneezing, nasal discharge, and lack of appetite. Transmission is via aerosol contact between cats.
- **Toxoplasmosis** is caused by a tiny protozoan parasite, *Toxoplasma gondii*, which resides in the intestinal tract of cats and in the tissues of many animals and rodents. If contracted by a pregnant woman in her first trimester, it can cause abortion of the fetus or blindness, retardation, or seizures in the newborn. It is estimated that 30% of cats and up to 50% of humans have been exposed to *T. gondii*. Cats and people can acquire *T. gondii* from undercooked meat, unpasteurized milk, contaminated water sources, soil or sandboxes contaminated with cat feces, flies, rodents, earthworms, and the litter boxes of infected cats. Cats are the only animals in which the *T. gondii* can complete its complex life cycle and can be excreted in feces.
- **Roundworms** can reside in the intestinal tracts of cats, other domestic animals, and wildlife. Cats can contract this parasite from eating infected wildlife, and mother cats can pass the larvae to their kittens before birth or through milk. Cats infected with these worms contaminate their surroundings by passing eggs or larvae in their feces. People get roundworms through direct contact with infected feces, by chance ingestion of contaminated soil, sand, or plant life. Children are more vulnerable to this parasite than adults. Roundworms can remain infective in soil for a prolonged period of time.
- **Hookworms** are a type of roundworm that lives in a cat digestive tract and can infect human skin causing lesions. People acquire hookworm larvae through contact with wet sand or soil. For example, sunbathers, children, electricians, plumbers and other workers who crawl beneath raised buildings are more susceptible than the general public. The larvae can remain alive and travel in the skin for up to several months. One type of

- hookworm can penetrate into deeper tissue and cause more serious damage to intestines and other organs.
- **Cat-Scratch Disease (CSD)** is caused by a bacterium, *Bartonella henselae*, and is transmitted from cat to cat by fleas. Over 90 % of human cases are associated with either a scratch or a bite received from a cat. CSD occurs in people of all ages, but most frequently affects children under the age of 10. People who contract this disease sometimes require treatment including antibiotics, analgesics, bed rest, and heat applied to painful lymph nodes. This disease can cause encephalitis in young children and people with compromised immune system can become seriously ill and may require prolonged treatment. Up to 80% of the cats in some studies were infected with this disease. Cats typically show no symptoms of the disease, and kittens are more commonly infected than adults.
- **Murine Typhus** is a disease caused by the bacterium *Rickettsia typhi*. It is transmitted from rats to people by the oriental rat flea, and to a lesser extent by the cat flea, which is found in large numbers on opossums. Rats, mice, and opossum are reservoirs of this disease. Cats are potential reservoirs of Murine Typhus. The disease is characterized by chills, headache, and fever, with a rash appearing about the fifth day of illness and lasting for up to two weeks. There is a 4.4% human case fatality from this disease in California. In 2006, Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services reported 6 cases of Murine Typhus in the city. This represented the first cases on record in the city in 100 years. Two cases were reported from Orange County in 2007. Transmission of Murine Typhus does not occur directly from a flea bite but rather from the resultant scratching which rubs infected flea feces into a flea-bite wound or other breaks in the skin allowing the rickettsia to enter the bloodstream.

- **Cats are NOT a Natural Part of Our Ecosystem.** Some people view cat predation of rodents as beneficial, but small mammals are important in maintaining native biologically diverse ecosystems. Field mice, squirrels, shrews, and other rodents are important prey for birds such as Great Horned Owl, Cooper and Red-tailed Hawks.
- **Cats Compete With Native Predators.** Owned cats have a huge advantage over native predators. They receive protection from disease, predation, competition, and starvation – factors which control native predators such as owls, hawks, bobcats, foxes, and coyotes. Cats with dependable food sources are not as vulnerable to changes in prey populations. Unlike many native predators, cats are not strictly territorial. As a result, cats can exist at much higher densities and may out-compete native predators for food. Unaltered cats are also prolific breeders. In warmer climates, a female cat can have 3 litters per year, with 4 to 6 kittens per litter.
- **Predation.** Extensive studies of the feeding habits of domestic, free-roaming cats have been conducted over the last 50 years. These studies show that approximately 60% to 70 % of the wildlife cats kill is small mammals, 20% to 30% are birds, and up to 10% are amphibians, reptiles, and insects. Scientists have found that the number and types of animals killed by cats vary greatly. Some free-roaming domestic cats kill more than 100 animals each year. Rural cats take more prey than suburban or urban cats. Birds that nest or feed on the ground are most susceptible to cat predation, as are nestlings and fledglings of many other birds. At Wildlife Rescue, Inc. in Palo Alto, California, approximately 25% of their patients between May and June 1994 were native cat-caught birds, and almost half were fledglings. Thirty percent of birds and 20% of mammals at the Lindsay Wildlife Museum in California were caught by cats.
- **Cats Transmit Diseases to Wildlife.** Unvaccinated cats can transmit diseases, such as rabies, to other cats, native wildlife and humans. Cats are the domestic animal most frequently reported to be rabid to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cats are suspected of spreading fatal feline diseases to native cats such as mountain lion, the endangered Florida panther, and bobcat. For more information, see the fact sheet, The Great Outdoors Is No Place For Cats at [www.abcbirds.org/cats](http://www.abcbirds.org/cats)