



The Scottish
Government



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CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE WELFARE OF CATS





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Edinburgh 2010

Code of Practice for the Welfare of Cats

This Code, which has been prepared following consultation, is issued with the authority of the Scottish Parliament pursuant to section 37 (animal welfare codes) of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

This Code applies in Scotland and has been issued by the Scottish Ministers (following approval by the Scottish Parliament).

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Preface

The aim of this Code is to help you to look after your cat properly. Under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (the Act) anyone who is responsible for an animal has a legal duty to take reasonable steps to ensure its welfare. The legislation quoted in Appendix 1 is not part of the Code but is intended to highlight the relevant legal requirements. The law, as quoted, is that in force on the date of publication or reprinting of the Code.

Generally, there is a duty to comply with legislation. Although the Code does not have legislative effect, it is intended to promote and give examples of good practice. Failure to comply with a provision of this Code, whilst not an offence in itself, may be relied upon as tending to establish liability where a person has been accused of an offence under Part 2 of the Act. Equally, compliance with a provision of the Code may be relied upon as tending to negate liability by a person in any proceedings for an offence under Part 2 of the Act.

This Code covers all domesticated cats for which a person is responsible.

A cat under veterinary supervision may have additional or special needs resulting from treatment which will supersede the requirements of this Code. As veterinary bills can be expensive, owners may wish to consider taking out appropriate pet insurance.

In addition to veterinary surgeons you will also find reference in the Code to 'pet care specialists'. These are people who, through qualification or experience, can also provide expert advice on welfare and some aspects of health for one or more types of pet animal. Examples are clinical animal behaviourists, veterinary nurses and dedicated welfare organisations.

To find out more about the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and details of your responsibilities under it, see Appendix 1 at the end of this Code. For further links, including links to other sources of information, see Appendix 2.

This preface is not part of the Code but is intended to explain its purpose and broad aims. Similarly, Appendix 1 which highlights the relevant legal requirements and Appendix 2, which lists some additional sources of information, are not part of the Code itself.



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Introduction

1. Owning and caring for a cat can be very rewarding, but it is also a big responsibility and a long-term financial and caring commitment.
2. Section 24(1) of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 states that:

“A person commits an offence if the person does not take such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which the person is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.”

Thus, animal owners and keepers have a legal duty of care for the animals for which they are responsible.
3. The duty of care placed on an animal owner or keeper is based on the ‘Five Freedoms’ originally recommended by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, but now generally accepted to cover any animal for which a person is responsible:
 - its need for a suitable environment;
 - its need for a suitable diet;
 - its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;
 - any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals;
 - its need to be protected from suffering, injury and disease.
4. These needs are explained in more detail in this Code, however, your cat may have other needs that must be met to ensure its welfare. If you are unsure what these may be it is important that you seek advice from a veterinary surgeon, a pet care specialist or an organisation such as the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA) or one of the cat welfare organisations. Some of the main organisations are listed in Appendix 2.
5. People are therefore responsible for an animal if they own or manage it. An owner has ongoing responsibility for their animal even if another person is in charge of it. A parent or guardian of a child under 16 years old is responsible for any animal that is owned or cared for by the child. This ensures that an adult can normally be identified as a person responsible for an animal. If an owner leaves an animal in the charge of another person, it is the owner’s duty to ensure that the person is competent and has the necessary authority to act in an emergency, as ultimately the owner bears responsibility even if someone else is temporarily caring for the animal.
6. Responsibility for an animal includes having an understanding of the specific health and welfare needs of the animal and having the appropriate knowledge and skills to care for the animal. Those responsible for animals will also have to be aware of and comply with the legislation and Codes, and to know when to seek qualified advice and help.

7. Every animal is different and as you get to know your cat, you will recognise its normal behavioural patterns. Observing your cat enables you to judge whether it is relaxed, healthy and comfortable. It is important that you are able to recognise any changes in behaviour, as these might indicate that your cat is distressed, ill or is not having its needs met in some other way.
8. You control your cat's lifestyle, such as whether it is kept indoors all the time, has access to a secure area, or is allowed free range outside via a cat flap. It is your responsibility to make sure that its needs are met, whatever the circumstances.
9. If you are worried about your cat, or you would like further advice about how to look after it and any future health care programme, vets, other appropriate professionals and animal welfare organisations are the best sources of advice.



SECTION 1: THE NEED FOR A SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT

1.1. This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable place to live.

Sleeping and resting areas

You should make sure that your cat has the opportunity to sleep in a comfortable, dry place

1.2. Different cats will have different needs. Cats that are not very tame, such as some farm cats, may prefer to live outdoors in more basic shelter. Cats that are used to being inside are more likely to prefer the warmth and comfort of indoors.



- 1.3. Cats should have:
- a sleeping/resting area that is comfortable, dry and draught free. In households where there are two or more cats there should be sufficient separate places for each cat to rest;
 - areas to hide, such as an enclosed bed or a box, although some cats will prefer to hide under a chair or under a bed;
 - opportunities to climb and jump, such as a simple 'platform' type bed or safe access to shelves and the tops of cupboards.
- 1.4. All animals need to rest and cats need to rest or sleep for long periods. If cats cannot find somewhere they feel safe to rest, their sleep may be disrupted and this can affect their health.



Hygiene

1.5. Part of providing a suitable environment is making sure that it is safe, clean and hygienic.

Household hazards

1.6. Cats usually avoid eating things that are harmful. There are some circumstances, however, where their natural behaviour or curiosity will lead them to eat things which may be poisonous to them. Some examples are when:

- indoor cats that do not have much to do, or inquisitive kittens investigate potentially poisonous plants (for example lilies, mistletoe, azalea and amaryllis) that they would normally ignore. Such plants should be avoided or placed where your cat cannot reach them. Make sure that any large plants are in a stable container that cannot be knocked over;
- your cat cleans poisonous substances from its fur. Because cats are meticulously clean animals that regularly groom, they will try to remove any substances that soil their coat. Therefore they are in danger of eating poisons such as paints, weedkillers, bleach and other household cleaning products, lily pollen etc. You should ensure that any potentially poisonous substances are stored safely and any spills mopped up carefully. If your cat's coat or feet have been contaminated with an unknown or potentially dangerous substance you should wrap your cat in a towel to prevent it licking and seek advice from your vet as soon as possible on the best way to remove the substance. Washing to remove substances may not always be appropriate unless dealing with something that is causing immediate irritation;

- eating or applying medicines intended for people or other animals. It is important only to give cats medicine or veterinary treatment that has been specifically prescribed or advised by your vet or, in the case of non prescription medicines, by a pet care specialist. Some human medicines, including aspirin, are toxic to cats.

You should always contact your vet immediately if you are concerned that your cat has come into contact with anything that could be harmful.

1.7. Other possible hazards include:

- your cat exploring appliances that arouse its curiosity such as tumble driers;
- falling from heights. If you live in a tall building you should ensure that windows and balconies are cat-proofed to prevent your cat from falling. A cat can climb to quite a high level and can squeeze through a very small space, so you should check these barriers regularly.

Safety at night

1.8. You may wish to consider whether it would be safer to keep cats indoors at night, when outdoor risks to their health and welfare could be greater. However, cats can be active at night and restricting them in this way may cause them stress.

When travelling

Make sure your cat is transported safely

- 1.9. You may need to transport your cat by car or other vehicle. In this situation, your cat has no control over its environmental temperature, its food and where it sleeps so, when travelling:
- you should make sure that your cat is not able to move freely about by putting it in a secure cat carrier of adequate size and with good ventilation. Ideally, hold the carrier firmly in place with a seat belt. If it is wedged between the seats or in the foot well of your car, it is important to ensure that there is adequate ventilation. You should also ensure that the carrier is not placed where your cat will become too hot, such as in direct sunlight or next to one of the car's heating vents. Do not put the carrier in the boot of a saloon car;
 - on long journeys you should regularly offer food, water and the use of a litter tray, but only within the safe confines of the vehicle when it has stopped.

Your cat should never be left alone in a vehicle in warm weather

1.10. Cats should **never** be left unattended in a car or other vehicle in warm weather. **This can cause immense suffering and be life-threatening.** The temperature in the vehicle can become very high extremely quickly and cause heat stroke or death.

Toileting

Your cat should have somewhere suitable to toilet

- 1.11. Cats need to toilet somewhere where they can behave naturally and feel comfortable. Cats prefer a quiet, easily accessible area away from food and water. This can be an indoor tray with some suitable material, such as cat litter. However, some cats will prefer to go outside.
- 1.12. Some general points about toileting:
- cats should have a litter tray and/or an area in the garden where they can dig and cover urine or faeces with soil or other material;
 - cats generally develop a preference for a particular type of litter when they are young and it is best to stick to the type of litter your cat prefers;
 - cats do not like to use heavily soiled areas, so soiled litter and faeces should be removed at least once a day and the tray should be cleaned and disinfected regularly. The disinfectant should be safe for cats and thoroughly rinsed off;
 - a litter tray should be placed in an area where the cat feels secure and is not likely to be interrupted, especially by other cats, dogs or people;
 - it is best to place the litter tray away from where the cat eats;
 - provide one litter tray per cat;
 - a cat that is straining to go to the toilet, or is going more frequently than normal may be ill. Owners should consult their vet if their cat is showing these signs;
 - be sure to wash your hands or wear gloves when you handle your cat's litter tray and make sure that the tray is not accessible to small children.

SECTION 2: THE NEED FOR A SUITABLE DIET

2.1. This section offers guidance on providing your cat with a suitable diet.

Your cat should have access to fresh water at all times

2.2. Your cat should always have access to fresh clean water from a clean bowl. This is essential for all cats unless your vet tells you differently. Many cats may not drink large amounts but their thirst may increase in hot weather or if you feed them dried food. Changes in the amount of water your cat drinks may also indicate illness.

Balanced diet

Your cat must have a balanced diet that meets its nutritional needs

2.3. To keep your cat healthy it is essential to provide it with a nutritionally balanced diet from early in its life. This will ensure that it receives essential nutrients in the correct quantities. A good diet can help prevent the effects of many diseases.

2.4. Cats are true carnivores, and cannot be vegetarians. They must eat many of the components found only in meat and animal fat in order to thrive and survive. This is because many years of evolution have made them so successful at hunting that they cannot create certain nutrients from vegetables as other species can.

2.5. Therefore, cats have to eat certain proteins, vitamins and fatty acids available only from meat or commercially prepared cat food. They also have a higher protein requirement than some other species, such as dogs.

2.6. An alternative to commercially prepared cat food is a home-made diet. However, this requires an excellent understanding of your cat's nutritional needs and if you choose to feed it this way it is very important that you get advice from your vet or pet care specialist.

2.7. A cat's ability to digest milk is significantly reduced after it is weaned. An adult cat therefore no longer needs milk and, because milk is a food, it should never be used as a substitute for water, which is an essential part of your cat's diet.

A cat's healthy weight

Your cat should not be too fat or too thin

2.8. **An obese cat is an unhealthy cat.** Most cats will only eat as much as they need. Some, however, may overeat and become overweight leading to a reduced quality of life. Obesity can lead to a whole host of health problems, including heart disease and diabetes.

- 2.9. It is important to remember that an underweight animal may also be ill. You should, therefore, know the best weight for your cat and try to make sure that its weight stays approximately the same throughout its adult life, although there may be some variation in your cat's weight at different times of the year.
- 2.10. You can assess your cat's weight by gently checking if you can feel its ribs; if they are hard to find it may be overweight. If the ribs and backbone are prominent, then your cat may be underweight and ill. If in doubt, ask your vet or pet care specialist whether your cat is within its correct weight range.

Body condition

Too thin

- Ribs can be seen on shorthaired cats;
- No fat can be felt (where present the skin pouch underneath the belly is empty i.e. skin on skin);
- Tummy looks empty due to lack of fat;
- Spine and hip bones can be seen – your cat looks like a size 0 model;
- Small amount of muscle over the back and hips, upper legs feel “stringy”, skull bone very obvious when stroking the head. Cat feels “bony” when stroked.

Ideal

- Well-proportioned – your cat looks sleek;
- Waist can be seen behind the ribs;
- Belly skin pouch allowed but is not totally filled out with fat;
- Ribs can be felt but not seen (with a slight fat covering);

Too heavy

- Ribs not easily felt as covered by a lot of fat;
- Waist not obvious – you cannot tell if cat has a skin pouch;
- Round body shape especially tummy (bear in mind breed differences);
- Has difficulty jumping up on chairs/table and going up stairs.

How often to feed your cat

You should make sure that your cat eats regularly

- 2.11. Cats living in the wild would eat many small rodents or birds during the day so pet cats may prefer to eat small meals frequently. They can have constant access to food, be fed as required, have lots of small meals or a couple of larger meals per day. It very much depends on the cat's preference and you should try to cater for your pet's preferences so far as you can. Kittens will need feeding with small meals more frequently than adult cats.



- 2.12. The food that you give your cat should be fresh every day. The amount of food can be measured out at the beginning of the day to guard against obesity in those cats that are not so good at regulating their appetites. If you have a 'greedy' cat it is a good idea to have the measured food divided up into a number of smaller meals per day. Where cats are kept indoors, owners can give some dried food in 'puzzle feeders', such as a ball that a cat rolls along the ground which releases the food gradually. This helps keep the cat entertained.

Other dietary needs

- 2.13. Cats that are pregnant, feeding their kittens, ill, old or young may well have different dietary needs from the average healthy adult cat. Your vet is the best person to advise you about the care of your cat in these circumstances.
- 2.14. As the person responsible for your cat you are expected to:
- provide food suitable for your cat according to its age and condition;
 - provide sufficient food to keep your cat healthy but not too much to cause obesity;
 - make sure that there are as many food and water bowls available as there are cats. Spread these around so that each cat can eat separately without feeling threatened by the others. Check that all of the animals are getting adequate food and water suitable for their individual needs.

SECTION 3: THE NEED TO BE ABLE TO EXHIBIT NORMAL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

- 3.1. This section offers guidance on your cat's behaviour.
- 3.2. Although cats have lived with us for centuries, their behaviour is still very close to that of their wild ancestors. Cats look and behave as they do because they are basically hunters and still need to have an outlet for these natural behaviours. Cats have learned to adapt to our domestic routines and how we live our lives, but they also need to be able to display their natural behaviour patterns.

Early experiences

- 3.3. Some cats are naturally more confident than others. However, the way that each cat behaves is also influenced by experiences during the first 8 – 10 weeks of life. You should ensure that your kitten meets and interacts positively with people, including children, dogs and other cats as well as coming into contact with normal household sights and sounds. Generally, cats that are well 'socialised' at this early age will be able to cope confidently as adults with most new situations and people.



- 3.4. Adult cats that have not had these early experiences may find it difficult to cope with day-to-day family life. They may find it stressful and be very nervous, hiding away a great deal of the time. As kittens may not go to new homes until they are about 8 weeks old or older, it is up to the owner or breeder of the litter to make sure that the kittens are well socialised if they are to develop into confident, happy pet cats.

Boredom and frustration

Your cat should have plenty of things to stimulate it mentally

- 3.5. Cats that are kept indoors or prefer this lifestyle rely on you to provide everything for them, including entertainment. You should ensure that your cat has enough mental stimulation from you and from its environment to avoid boredom and frustration. It is your responsibility to provide opportunities for your cat to satisfy its behavioural needs, such as play (hunting behaviours) and companionship.
- 3.6. Some cats that are frustrated may begin to exhibit behavioural changes such as withdrawal, overeating, sleeping more and possibly aggression or over-grooming.

Signs of stress

Observe your cat closely for signs of stress or changes in behaviour

- 3.7. Cats respond to stress in different ways and it is important that you can recognise any changes in the behaviour of your cat. In most cases, where cats are afraid, they prefer to run away to a quiet and hidden location. This is normal behaviour, but is reason for concern if it happens more than just occasionally.
- 3.8. When a cat is frightened or cannot escape, this can lead to aggression. A cat that is not used to people may hiss, spit or lash out when cornered.
- 3.9. Some cats that are afraid may not carry out their normal routine activities, such as eating, sleeping and grooming. Your cat may soil in the house if afraid to go outside or go to the litter tray. A cat may also spray urine indoors if stressed; this is especially the case if other cats are causing it to feel stressed.
- 3.10. When cats are very stressed over a longer period of time, they can develop abnormal behaviours. These may include:
 - being quiet and subdued or going missing for a few days;
 - being very nervous and watchful;
 - being unusually aggressive to people or other cats;
 - stopping eating, drinking or grooming;
 - overeating;
 - being restless and not sleeping or sleeping excessively;
 - howling or making unusual vocal sounds;
 - panting;
 - soiling or spraying urine indoors;
 - persistently hiding away;

- being unusually affectionate;
- pacing or 'patrolling' around the house;
- excessive grooming of the coat, or pulling out fur;
- being hypersensitive or over-reactive.

3.11. It is important that you are able to recognise any of these signs of stress in your cat; some may also be signs of illness. If you are concerned, you should contact your vet who may refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist.

Avoiding danger

Provide a place where your cat feels secure so that it can avoid things that frighten it

3.12. Fear and anxiety are normal responses that enable animals to avoid dangerous situations. However, animals that are put in situations where they are constantly fearful become very stressed and this can affect their health and welfare.

3.13. Part of a cat's natural behaviour is hiding from a real or perceived danger as well as from stressful circumstances. Some cats prefer to hide inside or under things while others prefer to climb up high. You should provide a secure hiding place that your cat can easily reach at all times so that it can hide away from stressful situations, such as contact with other animals or people. You should make sure that such facilities are available for each cat if you have more than one.

Hunting behaviour

Your cat should be able to show typical hunting behaviours

3.14. It is natural for cats to display hunting behaviours. This is not linked to hunger, as cats that have recently eaten will sometimes still try to hunt. If your cat does not or cannot go outdoors, you should play with it to mimic these hunting behaviours, using indoor toys and games. These can include a lightweight rolling toy or one that involves catching behaviour, such as fishing rod type toys. Indoor cats can also find mental stimulation in feeding from 'puzzle feeders' that release dried food gradually and from finding food hidden around the house.

3.15. Avoid using your hands and feet when playing with your cat as this may encourage aggressive behaviour in your pet when, for example, someone tries to stroke it.

Claw conditioning

- 3.16. Scratching or 'claw conditioning' is part of normal cat behaviour. Cats condition their claws for various reasons, and regular scratching removes the frayed and worn outer claws, exposing the new and sharper claws growing underneath. It also exercises and strengthens the muscles used when the claws move in and out of the paw, which is essential for a cat's normal behaviour of climbing and catching prey. There are also glands between the pads of a cat's feet, so scratching leaves scent marks.
- 3.17. Cats prefer somewhere to condition their claws that is tall enough for them to exercise at full stretch. This is why cats often scratch furniture or doors to condition their claws. To avoid or reduce damage to furniture you can provide a scratching post; these are available from most pet shops or can be home-made. The post should be high enough for the cat to exercise at full body stretch and stable enough so that it will not fall over when used.



Reproductive behaviour

3.18. Reproduction is one aspect of a cat's natural behaviour. You should, however, consider neutering your pet for the reasons outlined in Section 5.

Exercise

3.19. Make sure your cat has opportunities to exercise each day to stay fit and healthy. If it does not go outside, provide suitable indoor activities to keep your cat active.

SECTION 4: ANY NEED TO BE HOUSED WITH, OR APART FROM, OTHER ANIMALS

4.1. This section offers guidance on providing your cat with suitable company.

Your cat should have the choice of avoiding other cats

Socialisation

4.2. Our modern-day domestic cats originated from a species that lived a very solitary life. Although they may choose to be sociable with other cats, they are not as good at organising themselves into 'social groups' as are a more naturally social species like dogs.

Relations with other cats

- 4.3. Cats can form social groups with other cats that they have grown up with or know well, but will feel very threatened by cats outside this well-known group. The tolerance of cats towards other cats also varies with their early experiences (see Section 3) so their ability and desire to socialise can vary enormously. Cats may fight regularly and such fighting can result in serious injuries. It is, therefore, best not to keep too many cats together, especially if they do not have access to the outside.
- 4.4. Where cats come into close contact with other cats which they do not know or like, they may become very stressed; this is the commonest cause of stress in cats. Therefore, it is important for you to know how your cats react to other cats, both those kept in the same house as well as those in the neighbourhood. In multi-cat households individual cats that do not like each other should be able to avoid each other.
- 4.5. Stressed cats may sit still or hide, trying to avoid interactions with other cats. In some cases they may soil or spray indoors or exhibit other signs of stress (see Section 3).



Relations with other animals and people

Notice how your cat reacts to other pets or people, and make sure that it is able to avoid them if it wants to

- 4.6. Adults or children who do not understand the needs of cats, or how to handle them correctly, can cause them stress. Responsible adults should ensure that cats in their care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals. Dogs should be introduced to cats very carefully; the dog should be held safely on a lead at first so that it cannot chase the cat.

When you are away from home

You must arrange for your cat to be cared for if you are away from home

- 4.7. You have a responsibility to make sure that your cat is cared for properly when you go away. Many cats prefer to stay in their familiar environment, but you should take into consideration how your cat will cope in your absence, how long you will be away and whether a neighbour or cat sitter will be able to meet your cat's needs. You must never leave your cat in circumstances which are likely to cause it unnecessary suffering.
- 4.8. When someone else is looking after your cat they are responsible for its welfare and you should ensure that they understand its needs and any special requirements that it may have.
- 4.9. You may wish to consider whether a good cattery would be better, where your cat can be monitored more closely and cared for by someone knowledgeable on how to look after it. All boarding catteries must be licensed by the local authority.

Number of animals

- 4.10. If many cats are kept together, this can contribute to a stressful and unhealthy environment. Large numbers of animals need a great deal of care and you should not keep a large number of cats if you cannot meet their welfare needs. If they are not kept in hygienic conditions the environment can become contaminated with infectious agents that can cause disease and may spread between animals (see Section 5 for more details).

SECTION 5: THE NEED TO BE PROTECTED FROM SUFFERING, INJURY AND DISEASE

Make sure you receive regular health care advice about your cat

5.1. This section offers guidance on the health and welfare of your cat.

Health care

5.2. Good health is an essential part of good cat welfare. Your vet is the best person to advise you about routine health care, such as neutering, vaccination, and internal and external parasite control. The vet will also be able to advise on any health problems your cat may have.

5.3. As the person responsible for your cat's welfare you need to consider:

- prevention of disease. Vaccinations are available to protect your cat from certain serious diseases. Your vet will be able to provide advice about which are appropriate for your cat;
- prevention of parasite problems – many worming and flea preparations are available. Your veterinary surgeon or pet care specialist will be able to advise you about which are suitable for your cat. You should never use treatments on your cat that have been designed for use on dogs;
- provision of a healthy balanced diet (see Section 2);
- provision of the right environment that minimises the risk of injury and disease (see Section 1);
- prompt action if your cat becomes ill or begins to behave in an unusual way;
- good dental hygiene. Cats that develop inflamed gums, deposits on their teeth or bad breath may benefit from a health check by a vet.



Illness

Be aware of the signs of illness and if you notice any take your cat to a vet as soon as possible

- 5.4. It is important that you are aware of the signs of illness in your cat, and that you consult a vet promptly if you notice any.

Indications of illness include:

- a change in behaviour, such as hiding behind furniture, soiling indoors or becoming quiet or withdrawn;
- a change in eating or drinking habits, such as a lack of appetite or excessive thirst;
- a change in weight in either direction;
- signs of injury such as a swollen limb or walking in an abnormal way;
- signs of disease, such as a discharge from the eye, ear or nose, difficulty in going to the toilet, sickness and diarrhoea;
- signs of pain, such as not wanting to be touched in a sensitive area.

Grooming

You should ensure your cat's coat is properly groomed

- 5.5. Other natural cat behaviours include grooming and keeping their coats free from tangles. However, some cats need help with their coat care. If you have a longhaired cat, remember that you will have to groom the coat at least once a day to avoid mats and tangles. Your cat may also need special attention when recovering from an illness or injury. When cats stop grooming themselves, owners should seek advice from their vet as this can be a sign of stress or disease.

Neutering

You should consider having your cat neutered

- 5.6. One particularly important consideration is preventing the birth of unwanted kittens. You should, therefore, consider having your cat neutered. Cats can be neutered from about 4 months old onwards, but your vet will be able to advise you about the best age. With female cats, it is best to have them neutered before their first season. This usually happens from 6 months onwards but can happen as early as 4 months old.



5.7. Having your cat neutered has many benefits:

- female cats can have as many as 3 litters a year if not neutered. A cat can have up to 6 kittens per litter, potentially producing up to 18 possibly unwanted kittens a year so you may end up with more cats than you can properly care for;
- motherhood takes a lot out of a cat and having repeated litters may shorten her life expectancy;
- neutering female cats means they will not suffer from infections of the uterus later in life;
- un-neutered male cats are more likely to mark by spraying strong smelling urine inside their homes;
- un-neutered male cats are more likely to wander widely and to fight. Neutering them reduces the risk of abscesses from bites and other wounds;
- un-neutered male cats can annoy neighbours by spraying near their homes, fighting with their pet cats and being noisy;
- reproductive hormones can influence the behaviour of un-neutered male and female cats. This can result in the cat advertising their availability by making loud sounds ('calling') as well as fighting, wandering and marking their territory;

- Feline Leukaemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) are serious diseases spread through saliva. As neutered cats are less likely to wander and fight, there is less likelihood of them becoming infected or spreading these diseases to other cats;
- neutering prevents the development of uterine and testicular cancer and reduces the risk of female cats developing mammary tumours.

Identification

Your cat should be identified

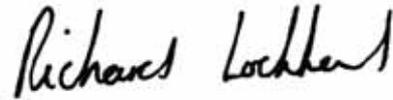
- 5.8 Cats are generally identified by two methods which can be used in combination to help trace their owner should they become lost. These are:
- microchipping – this is the preferred method of identification. A microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, that contains a unique identification number. It is injected under the skin of a pet by a vet or trained pet care specialist and the owner’s details are kept on a database. This will help you to be re-united if your cat is lost as, when a pet is found and taken to a rescue centre or a vet, it will be scanned with a reader to see if there is a chip under the skin. The number shown on the reader will then enable the owner to be traced. Owners should remember to update database details as necessary, for example, a change of address;
 - wearing a collar that has the cat owner’s contact details. A ‘quick release’ or snap opening collar is better than an elasticated collar, as the cat is less likely to be trapped should the collar become caught or tangled. A cat’s leg or jaw may become caught in an elasticated or ill-fitting collar and this can result in serious injury. The collar should be the correct size and you should be able to place two fingers underneath it when the cat is wearing it. However, identifying a cat with only a collar is far from secure since collars are frequently lost.

What to do if your cat is missing

- 5.9. If your cat is missing you should not just contact local vets and pet rescue centres; it is also worth contacting those further afield as cats can travel for some considerable distance when lost. You can also put up notices locally or, if you have recently moved house, in the previous location, and ask your neighbours to look in their sheds, garages or other outbuildings in case your cat has been accidentally shut in. If your cat is microchipped it will be identified as yours when scanned by a microchip reader and this will speed up its return to you. Once your cat has been found any notices that you have put up should be removed.

Euthanasia

- 5.10. It may be necessary, in the event of incurable illness, old age related problems or, more suddenly, in the event of an accident, to arrange the euthanasia of your cat. The cat's welfare must always come first. Therefore, in the best interests of your cat, you must give the issue your full consideration well before the time comes to make a decision to prevent your cat suffering unnecessary pain and distress. Where, in the opinion of a veterinary surgeon, your cat will not respond to treatment for any serious injury or condition involving significant pain, or is in such a condition that it would be cruel to keep it alive, the animal should be humanely destroyed by a vet or other qualified person without delay.
- 5.11. In a non-emergency situation, where your cat is permanently unsound or has a recurring or permanent and steadily worsening condition, a rational and humane decision should be made with due regard for the animal's future and welfare. In some cases it may be kinder to have your cat painlessly destroyed by a vet.



A member of the Scottish Executive

St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
17 December 2009

Appendix 1: The Law

The law, as quoted, is that in force on the date of publication or reprinting of the Code and, as amendments have been made to the law since then, the current legislation should be referred to and reviewed.

The Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006

The following sections of the Act are referred to in the Code and are set out here for ease of reference:

Unshaded boxes contain quotes from the legislation.

The box shaded in green summarises the relevant offences and penalties of the Act.

Section 18 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

Responsibility for animals

- (1) In this Part [the welfare part of the Act], references to being responsible for an animal mean being responsible for it on a permanent or temporary basis.
- (2) In this Part, references to being responsible for an animal include being in charge of it.
- (3) For the purposes of this Part, a person who owns an animal is always to be regarded as being a person who is responsible for it.
- (4) For the purposes of this Part, a person (“person A”) is to be regarded as responsible for any animal for which a person who is under 16 years of age, of whom person A has actual care and control, is responsible.
- (5) For the purposes of this Part, a person does not relinquish responsibility for an animal by reason only of abandoning it.

Section 19 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

Unnecessary suffering

- (1) A person commits an offence if–
 - (a) the person causes a protected animal¹ unnecessary suffering by an act, and
 - (b) the person knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act would have caused the suffering or be likely to do so.
- (2) A person who is responsible for an animal commits an offence if–
 - (a) the person causes the animal unnecessary suffering by an act or omission, and
 - (b) the person knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that the act or omission would have caused the suffering or be likely to do so.
- (3) A person (“person A”) who is responsible for an animal commits an offence if–
 - (a) another person causes the animal unnecessary suffering by an act or omission, and
 - (b) person A–
 - (i) permits that to happen, or
 - (ii) fails to take such steps (whether by way of supervising the other person or otherwise) as are reasonable in the circumstances to prevent that happening.
- (4) The considerations to which regard is to be had in determining, for the purposes of subsections (1) to (3), whether suffering is unnecessary include–
 - (a) whether the suffering could reasonably have been avoided or reduced,
 - (b) whether the conduct concerned was in compliance with any relevant enactment or any relevant provisions of a licence or code of practice issued under an enactment,
 - (c) whether the conduct concerned was for a legitimate purpose, for example–
 - (i) the purpose of benefiting the animal, or
 - (ii) the purpose of protecting a person, property or another animal,
 - (d) whether the suffering was proportionate to the purpose of the conduct concerned,
 - (e) whether the conduct concerned was in the circumstances that of a reasonably competent and humane person.
- (5) This section does not apply to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

¹ A “Protected animal” is: (a) of a kind which is commonly domesticated in the British Islands, (b) under the control of man on a permanent or temporary basis, or (c) not living in a wild state.

Section 24 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

Ensuring welfare of animals

- (1) A person commits an offence if the person does not take such steps as are reasonable in the circumstances to ensure that the needs of an animal for which the person is responsible are met to the extent required by good practice.
- (2) The circumstances to which, for the purposes of subsection (1), regard is to be had include—
 - (a) any lawful purpose for which the animal is kept,
 - (b) any lawful activity undertaken in relation to the animal.
- (3) For the purposes of subsection (1), an animal's needs include—
 - (a) its need for a suitable environment,
 - (b) its need for a suitable diet,
 - (c) its need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
 - (d) any need it has to be housed with, or apart from, other animals,
 - (e) its need to be protected from suffering, injury and disease.
- (4) This section does not apply to the destruction of an animal in an appropriate and humane manner.

Section 29 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

Abandonment

- (1) A person commits an offence if, without reasonable excuse, the person—
 - (a) abandons an animal for which the person is responsible, and
 - (b) does so in circumstances likely to cause it unnecessary suffering.
- (2) A person commits an offence if, without reasonable excuse, the person—
 - (a) leaves unattended an animal for which the person is responsible, and
 - (b) fails to make adequate provision for its welfare.
- (3) The considerations to which regard is to be had in determining, for the purposes of subsection (2), whether such provision has been made include—
 - (a) the kind of animal concerned and its age and state of health,
 - (b) the length of time for which it is, or has been, left,
 - (c) what it reasonably requires by way of—
 - (i) food and water,
 - (ii) shelter and warmth.

Section 37 of the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 provides:

Animal welfare codes

- (8) A person's failure to comply with a provision of an animal welfare code does not of itself render the person liable to proceedings of any sort.
- (9) In any proceedings for an offence under this Part, or under regulations made under section 26 or 27–
 - (a) failure to comply with a relevant provision of an animal welfare code may be relied upon as tending to establish liability,
 - (b) compliance with a relevant provision of an animal welfare code may be relied upon as tending to negative liability.

Offences and Penalties

A person who is convicted of an offence under section 19 (Unnecessary suffering) of the Act may be imprisoned for a maximum period of 12 months and/or fined up to £20,000. If they are convicted of an offence under section 24 (Ensuring welfare of animals) or section 29 (Abandonment) they can be imprisoned for a maximum period of 6 months and fined up to level 5 on the standard scale – the maximum is currently £5,000.

Appendix 2: Sources of information

- Your vet.
- The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF: www.rcvs.org.uk. The website has a 'find a vet' facility.
- Local libraries for books on cat care and computer access to the web.
- Websites such as:
 - Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors: www.apbc.org.uk
 - Blue Cross: www.thebluecross.org.uk
 - Cats Protection: www.cats.org.uk
 - The Scottish Government – Animal Health and Welfare Division for advice about the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006: www.scotland.gov.uk
 - Feline Advisory Bureau: www.fabcats.org
 - Governing Body of the Cat Fancy in the UK: www.gccfcats.org
 - Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals: www.pdsa.org.uk
 - Pet Care Trust: www.petcare.org.uk
 - Pet Food Manufacturers Association: www.pfma.com
 - Pet Health Council: www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk
 - Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Scottish SPCA): www.scottishspca.org

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