

A Safe Cat Is a Happy Cat: And Your Cat Is *Only* Safe Indoors



By Pat Ragan

Making the great indoors meet all of a cat's needs is easy and fun. Simply playing with an indoor cat keeps the animal stimulated and exercised—and safe from the outside dangers of injury and disease.

Most pet caregivers would not dream of letting their dogs roam the neighborhood freely—the dangers are too great. Yet many loving pet owners don't think twice about letting their cats roam, believing it's unnatural—even cruel—to keep cats cooped up in the house. The truth is that millions of owned cats suffer and die because they are allowed outside unsupervised.

To increase awareness about the threats to outside cats, The HSUS has launched our new Safe Cats™ campaign. We need to convince pet caregivers that there is no better place than home for their cats.

Some estimates put the average lifespan of a free-roaming cat who gets marginal care at less than three years, compared to 12–15 years for the indoor-only cat. Even in "safe" suburban neighborhoods, cats can face grave dangers and never return home.

Collisions with cars often kill free-roaming cats, as do rabies and other diseases like feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus. The toxins in chemically treated lawns, rat bait, and automotive antifreeze can also cause serious harm or death to free-roaming cats. And any animal shelter worker can attest that disturbed children and adults have been known to torture outdoor cats.

Free-roaming cats can pick up fleas—which can cause anemia, skin irritations, and allergies in cats—and ticks outside and then bring them home. And uncontrolled, unsterilized cats contribute to the homeless pet population.

Veterinarians often first see the consequences of unsupervised outdoor cats. Because of the injury and disease they treat in free-roaming cats—some so extensive or advanced that the cat can never recover—two out of three veterinarians recommend keeping cats indoors.*

It's simple to keep cats safe while enriching their lives. Going outside is not necessary for feline happiness. It's easy to make a home meet all of a cat's needs. Simply playing with an indoor cat can satisfy the animal's stalking instinct and keep the cat stimulated and exercised.

Wildlife also benefit when more cats are safely confined. Free-roaming cats kill millions of wild animals each year because of their instinct to hunt prey, not because of hunger. Most prey are small mammals like field mice and chipmunks, but about 25 percent are birds—many of them song birds visiting neighborhood feeders.

Change is on the way for cats and they will be much safer for it. Animal care and control agencies, humane organizations, and concerned cat lovers are becoming more active in reducing the free-roaming cat populations. And local ordinances encouraging pet owners to confine their cats are being enacted.

Our Safe Cats materials are available to animal shelters, veterinarians, and HSUS members nationwide to alert cat owners of the tragic consequences of letting cats roam. For more information, contact Stephanie Shain at 202-452-1100.

Pat Ragan is director of The HSUS Safe Cats campaign.

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