



Information Series

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How to Deal with Cat Problems

Because cats are usually attached to people, people are the key to solving cat problems. Solving a cat problem by talking with the cat's owner is *always* the best solution. If you don't know who owns the cat, but you can easily touch or hold it, or the cat has a collar, ask your neighbors if they know who owns the cat so you can talk directly to the owner.

How do local ordinances define a cat "Owner?"

In unincorporated Thurston County, Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater, the pet animal ordinances define a pet "Owner" as "any person who harbors, keeps, possesses or maintains a pet animal, or who encourages a pet animal to remain about their premises for a period of 14 consecutive days or more."

If I own a cat, do I need to license it?

After January 1997, the pet animal ordinances for Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater require cats be licensed. Cat unincorporated Thurston County are not required to be licensed. Animal Services encourages all cat owners to also microchip their cats. A cat can easily lose a collar with a tag. A microchipped cat does not have to wear their tag on their collar.

Do I have to keep my cat on my property?

Pet animal ordinances in Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater do not specifically require that cats remain on the owner's property. However, they do require that cat owners take responsibility for the damage or distress their pets may cause when on another person's property.

The cities' ordinances state "any person who harbors, keeps, maintains or has temporary custody of a pet animal shall be responsible for the behavior of the animal whether the person knowingly permits the behavior or not... Such person shall violate the terms of this chapter if (in a city jurisdiction)... the person's pet animal constitutes a nuisance pet animal as defined...

Nuisance pet animal is a class 4 infraction."

How do the cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater define a "nuisance pet animal?"

A "nuisance pet animal" is defined by ordinances in Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater as a pet that:

- 1) damages or destroys landscaping or property of another person, including destruction of wildlife that has been purposefully attracted to private property; or
- 2) soils or defecates on public or private property other than the owner's, unless such waste is immediately removed and properly disposed of by the owner of the pet animal; or
- 3) causes unsanitary, dangerous or offensive conditions; or
- 4) is a female dog or cat in heat not confined within a structure to prevent access of male dogs or cats except for planned breeding; or
- 7) trespasses on private property and the property owner or tenant supplies a written complaint to Animal Services, and in the case of a cat, physically contains the cat."

(Sections 5 and 6 of the ordinances do not apply to cats.)

When is a cat a "stray?"

People often use the word "stray" to describe scruffy animals. For Animal Services, "stray" is a legal term derived from the word "estrays" and means the animal was found unidentified and wandering or is lost and the owner is unknown.

Can I trap a cat(s) that has strayed onto my property?

Ordinances for unincorporated Thurston County, Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater allow residents to trap cats that have strayed onto

their property as an “at large” pet. The ordinances state: “A pet animal shall not be trapped in any manner that subjects the animal to injury inherent in the mechanism of the trap. **A humane box trap may be set on a complainant's property for the purpose of trapping nuisance pet animals. Animals which are caught in such a trap must be returned to their owners or taken to Animal Services. Injurious confinement or restraint of a pet animal is a misdemeanor.**”

Should I notify my neighbors before I set a trap?

Prior to using a trap, Animal Services strongly recommends you notify the neighbors of the cat problem. Notification gives the cat owners the opportunity to deal with their pet's behavior. Notification can be accomplished by posting a notice in visible locations, delivering a flyer door-to-door, mailing a notice to the neighbors, or including a note in a neighborhood newsletter. The notice should state that, to solve the problem, the cat will be humanly trapped. Sometimes this notification works and you will not need to set traps.

Where can I rent a “humane trap box?”

If you reside in unincorporated Thurston County, Olympia, Lacey, or Tumwater, you can rent a humane trap from Animal Services. The rental fee is \$15 (tax included) for a 1 week rental and \$6.00 (tax included) for each additional day. Reduced rates are available for low-income seniors and disabled residents.

To rent a humane trap, please call Animal Services at (360) 352-2510. During the warm months, there may be a 3 to 5 day waiting period due to the number of requests.

Animal Services recommends you set the trap with canned cat food. Do not use tuna. It has an odor some people consider “irresistible” to cats. You don’t want to attract cats that do not normally come onto your property!

What happens to a cat that has been trapped?

Unidentified, trapped cats will be taken to the Animal Services shelter for the owner to reclaim. Be sure to tell Animal Services staff if the cat only recently came onto your property or into

your house). Even if the cat is aggressive, it may belong to someone in your neighborhood.

Ordinances for unincorporated Thurston County, Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater state: "Upon impoundment, Animal Services is required (as soon as feasible) to notify the owner, if any owner is known, of the impoundment and the terms required for the pet animal's return. Notification shall include a description of their pet, the reason for impoundment, the general location where the animal was found, and the date it occurred."

If the owner fails to reclaim the pet, it may be made available for adoption after 48 hours, unless the animal is unsuitable for adoption. If the pet is not reclaimed or adopted at the end of 96 hours, it may be euthanized."

Does a cat owner have to pay any reclaim fees?

There is a minimum \$25 fee for any cat reclaim. If the cat is unlicensed and resides in Olympia, Lacey or Tumwater, there is a license fee of \$10.00 or \$18.00.

What happens to a cat that has bitten someone?

Special provision is made for holding cats (even wild or feral cats) that have bitten a human. These cats must be quarantined for 10 days.

What should I do about a feral cat problem?

You should notify Animal Services if you have problems with a feral cat colony. Under the law, you are acting as the cats’ “owner or keeper” because you have "harbored" the cats for “a period of 14 consecutive days or more.”

If the colony is not located on your property, Animal Services must have the property owner’s permission to place traps.

If the feral cats are dangerous to handle, the law provides that they may be euthanized immediately.