

Cleaning urine and faeces marks in the home

Housesoiling and marking can begin for a number of reasons but, in some cases it continues purely because the cat can detect the smell of locations where it has previously marked or gone to the toilet. Removing these odours is essential to stopping further soiling.

It is also important to protect the floor and furnishings to prevent urine or faeces from soaking in and leaving a permanent odour.

The best way to remove odours from existing sites is as follows:

Make up 3 sprayer bottles, labelled A, B, and C. They should be filled in accordance with the following instructions:

A: A solution of *biological* clothes washing powder or liquid in water [approximately 1 part of powder/liquid cleaner to 10 parts of water].

B: Plain water.

C: Surgical spirit [clear surgical spirit, not coloured methylated spirit]

Each soiled site should be cleaned in the following way:

- Use paper towel to remove urine and faeces.
- Spray the area with bottle A.
- Wipe clean with paper towel.
- Spray with bottle B.
- Wipe clean and mop dry with paper towel.
- Spray with bottle C, and allow to dry before allowing the cat into the area.

Do not use a reusable cloth for cleaning, as this will spread urine odours from place to place as you clean.

It is advised that you test this cleaning method on a small and inconspicuous area of the carpet or fabric you are cleaning to ensure that it is not damaged.

If you are cleaning curtains or furniture covers that can be removed and washed then machine wash them according to the manufacturer's instructions.

Preventing further soiling

Faecal odours are relatively easy to remove using the method above, but urine may seep into cracks in flooring and at the edges of furniture so that odours are hard to remove.

Particular problem areas are:

- Wooden furniture.
- Joints between floorboards or panels of laminated flooring.
- The junction between hard flooring and skirting boards, kitchen cupboards etc.
- The top edge of skirting boards.
- Grouting between ceramic tiles [on floors or walls].
- Electrical equipment and electrical outlets.

These, and any other potential traps for urine, must be cleaned and sealed so that urine odours do not penetrate.

Wooden furniture should be regularly waxed with a heavy-grade wax polish [not a spray] so that the surface is protected. The feet of wooden chairs and tables can sometimes absorb urine, so these should be protected with a dab of varnish on the underside, if possible.

Joints between wooden floors should be sealed and painted over with at least 2 coats of a high-quality varnish. Gaps between floorboards are easily sealed with rubber or silicone bath sealant, which is available in many colours, before painting over with varnish.

The junction between a wooden or hard floor and the bottom of skirting board should be sealed with a rubber or silicone bathroom sealant.

The same method may be used to seal the top edge of skirting board.

Porous grouting may be steam-cleaned or replaced with a waterproof equivalent, and then painted over with an appropriate sealant [sealant for terracotta tiles and grouting is available from most DIY shops].

Electrical equipment such as toasters, kettles, televisions and audio equipment may become targets for spraying, as they heat up and release smells that cats find objectionable. Once they have been contaminated with urine they will release urine odours every time they switch on, which attracts further spray marking. Soiled cooking equipment should be discarded, as it presents a health hazard unless it can be completely cleaned. Audio and TV equipment that has previously been soiled must be cleaned with great care. It may not be possible to remove all traces of urine. Audio equipment may need to be put into a glass fronted rack or cupboard away from access by the cat, and TV equipment covered with a polythene sheet when it is switched off.

Urine getting into electrical outlets can create a serious risk of shock or fire, so access to these locations should be restricted. As an additional protection, electrical outlets can be protected by covering them with clingfilm. Alternatively a flap of polythene may be taped to the wall above the socket so that it drapes over the outlet and redirects urine over it in the manner of a canopy.

Replacing flooring and soft furnishings

If an area is persistently soiled then urine and faeces odour will soak in and may be very difficult to remove. Consider removing carpets, curtains and soft furnishings that have been badly damaged by urine or faeces. You may be able to have these cleaned professionally.

If carpet or other flooring must be replaced due to soiling then the floor must be scrubbed clean with a biological cleaner as above. Rotten or sodden timbers should be removed and replaced. The floor must be cleaned several times and then allowed to dry before any new flooring is put down. Paint wooden boards with varnish or gloss paint before laying new flooring over them, as this helps to reduce the return of old odours. To prevent urine from soaking through the new flooring, and to prevent remaining odours from returning, it is advisable to put down a layer of thick polythene sheet in overlapping strips before laying the new flooring. Consider putting a layer of polythene between the carpet and underlay, so that any accidental soiling is easier to clean. This extra layer may be put in strategically in locations where the risk of future soiling is highest.

Continuing cleaning

Once you have cleaned a particular spot once, it is tempting to leave it until the cat soils there again. In fact, this means that urine odours will continue to accumulate because one round of cleaning will never be enough to remove all of the odour. Instead, you should clean each spot several times each week, until it has not been soiled at all for at least 3 weeks. This will remove all odours and reduce the chance of further soiling if the cat has a relapse.

