

Are you a cat owner?

This brochure contains important information you need to know. It also tells you where to find further helpful advice about cat ownership.



Benefits of cat ownership

Cats make great pets! They are quiet, clean and they don't need a lot of space or exercise. Compared to dogs, cats cope better with being left alone when owners are at work. Cats provide excellent company. They can be playful and affectionate, yet can still be very independent. Cat ownership also teaches children responsibility, and helps them develop their social and nurturing skills.



Legal responsibilities

The law aims to protect animals from neglect and cruelty, and to protect the community from animals becoming a nuisance or a danger.

This brochure outlines your responsibilities as a cat owner. If you don't comply with legal requirements, such as microchipping and registration, you can be fined. Note that there can be additional legal requirements depending on where you live. Check with your council to see if they have any local laws. For example, they may require cats to be desexed, or to be kept on their owner's property during certain hours.

Under animal cruelty legislation, if you mistreat or fail to properly care for your cat you can be prosecuted and face fines, jail or a ban on owning an animal.

Where the owner of a cat is under 18 years of age, their parent or guardian will be deemed the legal owner of the cat in the event of any penalties or prosecutions.

Microchipping and registration

All cats three months of age and over must be registered with the local council. Existing registrations must be renewed by 10 April each year. If being registered for the first time, cats must be microchipped prior to registration. Permits are required when there are more than a certain number of dogs or cats kept in a household. This number is set by your local council, so you need to check the limit with them.

If your cat is found wandering off your property and is not identified, he/she can be seized and impounded. You may have to pay a fine when reclaiming your cat from the pound.

Your cat's council registration tag should be attached to an elasticised collar or safety collar that breaks away if he/she gets caught on something. The collar should be firmly fitted - you should be able to fit two fingers comfortably between your cat's collar and its neck. It is a good idea to place a bell on the collar too, to alert any animal that your cat may try to stalk and catch.

Microchipping and registering pets greatly improves their chances of being returned to you if they become lost. If you move house, make sure you update your details with your local council, and also with the microchip registry (you have to contact both organisations separately).

Registration fees also provide a range of other important services. These services include animal control and community education about responsible pet ownership and dog bite prevention.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.





Health care

You must:

- feed your cat an appropriate balanced diet to maintain him/her in good condition. Either too little or too much food, or the wrong type of food can cause health problems for your cat. Don't feed dog food or a purely vegetarian diet to cats as this will not supply all the necessary nutrition
- supply clean cool water at all times in a container that cannot be tipped over
- provide a comfortable dry sleeping area, including shade during the day
- protect your cat's health. This includes regular vaccinations, worming (including heartworm), flea and tick control, and veterinary treatment for injuries or illness
- give your cat plenty of company and time with the family
- ensure your cat is adequately cared for when you are on holidays.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.

Desexing



If you aren't going to breed from your cat, have him/her desexed. Thousands of healthy cats are euthanased (put to sleep) each year in Victoria. This is because not enough homes can be found for them – we have an 'over supply' of cats. Many cats are bred by accident, because owners don't get around to desexing them.

You are less likely to forget to desex your cat if you have it done as soon as the cat is purchased or obtained. In general, cats can safely be desexed from three months of age. Desexing can be less stressful for kittens than for older cats, and they may recover more quickly. Your vet can give you further guidance on desexing your kitten/cat.

Along with helping to prevent cat overpopulation, there are many other benefits of desexing cats. Desexed cats can be better behaved. They may be less likely to roam, yowl at night or spray strong smelling urine. Desexing pets can also prevent them from getting certain types of cancer. It is also important to desex a female cat kept inside as they can continue to cycle if they are not mated which can cause health problems for the cat.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.



Confinement to the property

Serious problems can occur if cats are allowed to roam outdoors, particularly at night (it's estimated around 80% of accidents involving cats happen at night). Roaming cats can get hit by cars, injured in fights, catch fatal diseases (eg feline AIDS) or become lost. Roaming cats can also kill native wildlife – even well fed cats will hunt. Roaming cats can annoy neighbours too, by spraying, fighting, yowling and digging in gardens.

Legally, you are not allowed to let your cat trespass on other people's property. If your cat wanders onto another person's property more than once, he/she may be seized and impounded. Council may issue an order to stop your cat trespassing, and if you don't comply you can be fined. Some councils also have laws prohibiting cats from certain areas, or requiring cats to be kept on their owner's property during certain hours.

Most importantly, cats kept on their owner's property tend to live much longer and healthier lives than cats that are allowed to roam.

You can keep your cat in the house or flat with you, or in the garage or shed at night. Just make sure he/she has a warm dry sleeping area, a litter tray and plenty of water.

Ventilation is important if keeping cats in a confined area, especially if you have a number of cats. Ventilation prevents the spread of disease and respiratory problems from a build up of fumes or stale air.



Other options for keeping your cat confined include buying or building a “cat enclosure” for your yard, or installing “cat proof fencing”. Look under “Pet Shops’ Suppliers” in the Yellow Pages for companies that sell enclosures and netting.

If you’re handy and would like to save money, a free booklet “How to build cat proof fencing and cat enclosures” is available from your local council. This booklet includes step by step DIY instructions with supporting illustrations and photos. Refer to back of brochure for more information.

When training your cat to accept confinement, skip the morning feed and call him/her in at night to be fed. Don’t feed your cat until he/she comes inside – your cat will learn quickly that he/she won’t get fed unless home by dusk. Once inside, don’t let your cat out again until morning. If you wish, you can gradually extend the time your cat spends indoors or in an enclosure. When confining cats for long periods you must enrich their environment. This will prevent them from getting bored or developing behavioural problems.



Environmental enrichment

Cats have a number of basic needs that must be met if they are to stay happy and healthy when they are contained in the house, yard or an enclosure.

- **Companionship.** Cats require plenty of social contact with owners. If cats are in an enclosure, this can be achieved by access to the house through a cat door (and tunnel if applicable). Set aside time each day to interact with your cat, for instance, patting, playing with, or grooming him/her.
- **A well-informed owner.** You should find out as much as you can about cat behaviour and care. Talk to your vet about health and nutritional requirements for cats.

- **Space.** Cats prefer to have their own 'personal space', and this is particularly important to prevent aggression in group housing situations. Each cat requires his/her own area that provides all the essentials (food, water, bed, resting places, litter tray etc).
- **Sleeping, resting and viewing areas.** Cats like to spend a lot of time sleeping and resting in quiet areas where they feel safe and secure. Cat beds can be purchased, or blankets, towels, pillows etc can be provided. High sided cat beds and boxes are useful to give cats a sense of 'privacy'. Cats use elevated areas as vantage points from which to observe their surroundings. These are essential, and can be provided by access to platforms, shelves, climbing posts or window ledges. Some cats love to watch birds (you can place a bird bath/feeder outside the window or enclosure), insects (try planting flowers to attract them), fish in aquariums and even nature footage on TV!



- **Food and water.** Ensure bowls are located away from the litter tray. Many cats like having their water bowl in a separate area to their food bowl. Cats can also be given grass to chew (non-toxic varieties).
- **Litter boxes.** Each cat requires his/her own litter box, that is big enough for easy access and is located in a safe and private area (if a cat is startled while using the box, he/she may not use that box in future). You may have to experiment to find out your cat's preferences for covered or uncovered boxes, type of litter and depth of litter. Cats are very clean animals that do not like using dirty litter boxes, so boxes will need to be scooped daily, and cleaned with water and non-scented soap once a week. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odours between scoopings. If you are pregnant, it is best if litter trays are cleaned and disinfected daily. Wear rubber gloves when cleaning trays, or get someone else to do it for you. This will prevent you catching Toxoplasmosis, which is a very rare disease that can be transmitted through contaminated cat faeces, and can harm unborn babies.
- **Scratching posts.** Scratching, a natural behaviour for cats, sharpens claws, stretches muscles and leaves scent marks. Your cat will need a scratching post, which can be horizontal or vertical, and can be made from sisal (a coarse natural fibre), carpet, cardboard or wood. You can encourage your cat to use the scratching post (rather than other things like the furniture!) by putting catnip on it. Cats have an excellent sense of smell, and many cats love catnip, which can be supplied as a dried herb or grown fresh in pots.
- **Toys and exercise.** Exercise your cat through play (or even by training your cat to walk outside on a harness and leash!). Cats enjoy toys that move or make noise, and remind them of prey such as mice, birds, and insects. They need a variety of toys they can roll, pounce on, capture and bite, and toys should be rotated regularly to prevent boredom. Some examples of simple and cheap toys (that are safe for cats to play with) are crumpled paper balls, paper bags to explore, cardboard boxes, and toilet paper tubes. Try stuffing old cotton socks with cotton balls and some catnip, and tying a knot in the end. You can also buy furry toys (eg in the shape of a mouse) that make noises and can be rolled, balls (eg ping pong balls, or balls that can be filled with food or treats), sticks with toys dangling from the end of a string etc.
- **Sunshine.** If your cat is not in an outdoor enclosure, ensure it can access window ledges for sunshine, or place a chair near a window.

Transport

If transporting your cat, ensure he/she is transported in a well ventilated cage or cat carrier and that the cage or container is strapped into the car to prevent it sliding around. Don't transport your cat in an enclosed boot (such as a sedan boot).

Don't leave a cat in a car on even a mild day as the interior of a car can heat up quickly and cause heat stress and even the death of your cat.



Cat training

There are many sources of information regarding kitten socialisation, cat training, and dealing with cat behavioural problems. For instance, your local veterinarian or animal shelter will be able to advise you on a range of cat health and cat behavioural issues. They may also run "kitten kindy" or similar socialisation classes for kittens.

Libraries and bookshops may stock various books on cat care and behaviour topics. The Internet has lots of cat-related sites, which you will be able to find easily by doing a search on key words such as "cat behaviour", "kitten socialisation", "cat training" etc. You can also contact cat clubs or associations (look under "Pet Clubs" in the Yellow Pages).



Finding a lost cat

If your cat is registered and microchipped, and you have kept your contact details up to date, it will be easy for the council to notify you if they find him/her. If your cat is not microchipped or identified, you will have to contact your local council pound. Descriptions of cats can vary greatly, and collars and tags can come off, so try to visit the pound to check for your cat. Repeat visits may be necessary until the cat is found. Take a cat carrier and documentation such as council registration papers, vaccination certificates, pedigree papers or photos. If your cat is not found, leave a description of him/her, when and where he/she was lost, and your name and phone number.

Call and visit neighbouring pounds, animal shelters and vet clinics (Animal shelters are listed in the Yellow Pages under 'Animal Welfare Organisations'). Ask neighbours if they have seen your cat. Search the neighbourhood and call your cat, particularly at night. Put notices in local shop windows. Keep descriptions general so you can differentiate between a genuine and a nuisance caller by requesting they give you a more detailed description of the cat.

Finally, put a 'Lost and Found' notice in newspapers and notify radio stations that offer free announcements. (See 'Radio Stations' in the Yellow Pages).

If your cat is registered and identified, any council or animal shelter that takes him/her in will notify you in writing within four days of impoundment. Councils must hold all identified impounded cats for eight days. It is important you begin looking for your lost cat as soon as you realise he/she is missing. If you do not reclaim your cat within eight days, council may rehouse or euthanase your cat.



Who's for cats?

It's estimated there are half a million unowned cats in Victoria. These cats keep breeding more and more kittens into a life of disease and neglect.

This problem is made worse by people who feed stray cats. People feel sorry for the cats, and think they are helping them. But they are actually feeding a bigger problem.

The solution is for people to stop just feeding stray cats, and either:

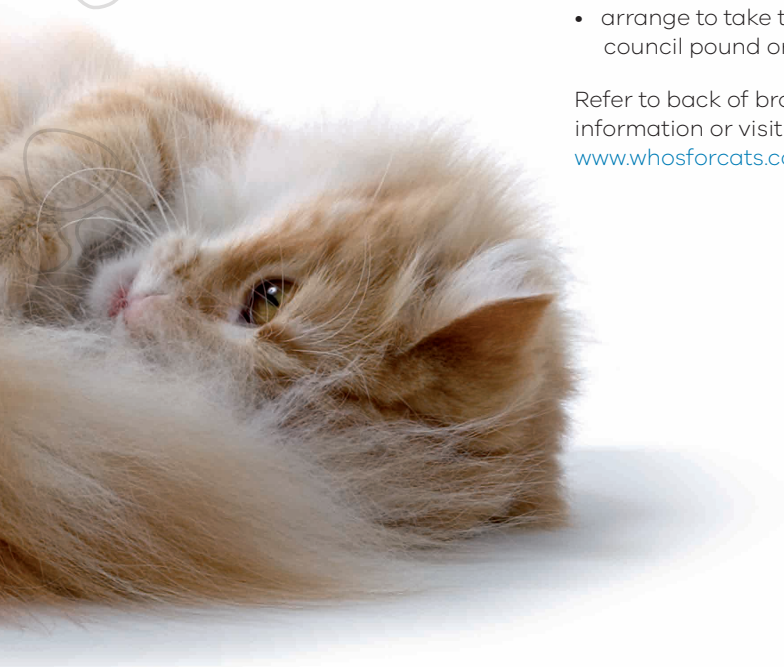
- take full ownership of the cat – this means desexing, identifying and registering, as well as feeding, the cat;

or

- arrange to take the cat to the local council pound or animal shelter.

Refer to back of brochure for more information or visit

www.whosforcats.com.au



Children and cats

There are a number of education programs in Victoria which teach children (and their parents) about responsible cat ownership.

The “We Are Family” Program educates expectant parents and young families in relation to pets and children. It focuses on:

- preparing the home environment and pets for the baby’s arrival
- the importance of actively supervising all interaction between young children and pets
- the need to securely separate children and pets when you cannot actively supervise them.

“We are Family” is available in 70 Victorian hospitals with a maternity service and 800 maternal and child health centres. More information is available on the website www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/community-and-education

The “Pets in the Community” Primary School Program begins the education process focussing on basic animal husbandry and our duty of care to our pets. Concepts include security, housing, identification, food, health, socialization exercise, training and safe behaviours. The program is available to all Victorian primary schools. Each school has received a comprehensive curriculum package. More information is available on the website www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/pets/community-and-education



Cats and emergencies

It is important to plan ahead for taking care of cats during bushfires or other emergencies:

- ensure your cat is identified with a collar or tag as well as a microchip
- ensure that your details are correct in the microchip database
- ensure your cat's vaccinations are up to date
- prepare a cat emergency/disaster kit and place it in a prominent place. Include food, water, bowls, blankets/ bedding, medication, and a labelled travel cage
- identify where you will evacuate your cat to. Check with your local council about evacuation options
- if your plan is to evacuate, do so early on the morning of Severe or Extreme fire danger days, or the night before a Code Red day
- if you are unable to evacuate, determine the safest area for your animals on your property to shelter from the fire front, and move them there early.

For more information about planning for your animals during the fire season visit www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies

Domestic Animal Businesses

Domestic Animal Businesses include: pet shops, pounds and shelters, breeding and boarding establishments. These must be registered with the local council, and comply with Codes of Practice. These Codes of Practice are designed to protect the rights of consumers, and to ensure the welfare of animals.

Refer to back of brochure for more information.

If you can't keep your cat

Circumstances may arise that mean an owner is no longer able to keep their cat. In this case owners must find an appropriate new home for the cat, surrender him/her to the local council or an animal shelter or have a veterinarian put him/her to sleep (euthanase them). If your cat was purchased from a breeder, contact the breeder as he/she may be able to assist with rehoming your cat. Dumping of animals is an offence. If you are having an animal put to sleep it must be done humanely eg by a veterinary practitioner.

More information

Call your local council if you have any questions about your rights or responsibilities as a cat owner. They can help with wandering or nuisance pets too.

If you have an animal welfare question or are concerned about the welfare of another animal you can talk to your local veterinary practitioner, RSPCA or local council.

Call your local council to order free responsible pet ownership brochures on a range of topics. Fact sheets are also available online at www.vic.gov.au/pets.

Topics include:

- Cat condition score chart
- Code of Practice for the Private Keeping of Cats
- How to build cat proof fencing and cat enclosures
- If you love your cat, tag it!
- Make sure your cat naps when you do
- Microchip for life
- Pet registration – value for your dollar
- The time to desex is when you get your pet
- Things you should know about Pet Shops
- Things you should know about Pounds and Shelters
- Who's for cats?

If you wish to know more about your legal responsibilities you can refer to the relevant Act and Regulations, these are:

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986
and

Domestic Animals Act 1994

These can be found at www.vic.gov.au/pets



Animal Welfare - it's your Duty to Care

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