

**RESOLUTION #7 — 2011**  
**Regular Annual Session**  
***PENDING WAIVER OF PRIOR NOTICE PROVISION***

Submitted by  
AVMA Executive Board

**Revised Policy on Free-roaming, Owned Cats**

**RESOLVED**, that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) supports the policy on Free-roaming, Owned Cats as noted below (deletions are ~~struckthrough~~; additions are underlined).

**Free-roaming, Owned Cats**

The AVMA ~~strongly encourages owners of domestic cats in urban and suburban areas to keep them indoors.~~ veterinarians to educate clients and the public about the dangers associated with allowing cats free-roam access to the outdoors.

Free-roaming cats may be exposed to injury, suffering, and death from vehicles; attacks from other animals; human cruelty; poisons; and traps. Additionally, these cats are more likely to be exposed to feline-specific and zoonotic diseases, and will prey on and can negatively impact native wildlife populations.

**Statement about the Resolution**

The existing policy was adopted in June 2001. It was reviewed by the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) in 2008 in accord with the every-five-year review directive, and recommendations for revision were submitted to the Executive Board in April 2009 and November 2010. Both proposed revisions were referred back to the AWC because of concerns about their impact on “barn cats.”

The AWC continues to be concerned about risks to the welfare of freely roaming, owned cats. While they may vary in prominence with respect to locale, these risks are essentially the same in urban, suburban, and rural settings.<sup>1</sup> Dangers to owned cats allowed to roam outdoors include injury and/or death from being hit by vehicles, attacks by other animals, human cruelty, and exposure to traps and poisons.<sup>2,3</sup> In addition, freely roaming, owned cats are at increased risk of being exposed to feline-specific and zoonotic diseases.<sup>4,5</sup> Accordingly, the AWC recommends that current policy be modified to encourage veterinarians to educate cat owners and members of the public about the dangers associated with allowing owned cats to roam freely outdoors.

With respect to “barn cats,” while using free-roaming cats for rodent control is traditional in many areas, it is not an effective strategy when the goal is near total elimination of vermin, because the presence of cats limits the ability to use baits, has variable and often low efficacy,<sup>6,7</sup> and shelter and food provided for the cat may actually encourage colonization of buildings by vermin.<sup>7</sup> Cats may also present hygiene or accident risks and can serve as disease vectors, particularly on farms.<sup>8</sup>

The revised policy is a more concise version of a policy already adopted by the American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP), and the AAFP has indicated its concurrence with the version the AWC is proposing for adoption by the AVMA. The revised policy does not direct owners to not allow their cats outdoors, nor does it restrict the keeping of “barn cats.” Instead it encourages veterinarians to assist their clients in making an informed decision about allowing/keeping their cats outdoors by providing them with science-based information about the risks associated with this practice.

1. Lepczyka CA, Mertiga AG, Liua J. Landowners and cat predation across rural-to-urban landscapes. *Biological Conservation* 2003;115:191–201.
2. Overall, K. *Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals*, 1997, p. 258
3. Lacheretz, A. DMoreau, D. Cathelain, H. Causes of death and life expectancy in carnivorous pets (I). *Revue De Medecine Veterinaire*, 2002;153:819-822
4. DeFeo, ML, Dubey JP, Mather TN. Epidemiologic investigation of seroprevalence of antibodies to *Toxoplasma gondii* in cats and rodents. *American Journal of Veterinary Research* 2002;63:1714-1717
5. Kramer L, Genchib C. Feline heartworm infection: serological survey of asymptomatic cats living in northern Italy. *Veterinary Parasitology* 2002;104:43-50.
6. Van't Woudt BD. Roaming, stray, and feral domestic cats and dogs as wildlife problems. *Vertebrate Pest Conference Proceedings Collection*. University of Nebraska Lincoln, 1990.
7. Vantassel S, Hygnstrom S, Ferraro D. Controlling house mice. *NebGuide*, published by University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural resources G1105, 2005.
8. Van Sambeek F, McMurray BL, Page RK. Incidence of *Pasteurella multocida* in poultry house cats used for rodent control programs. *Avian Diseases* 1995;39:145-146.

**Financial Impact:**      None

<b>OFFICE USE ONLY</b>				
	<b>RECOMMEND APPROVAL</b>	<b>RECOMMEND DISAPPROVAL</b>	<b>RECOMMEND REFER TO . . .*</b>	<b>NO RECOMMENDATION</b>
<i>Executive Board</i>				X
<i>House Advisory Committee</i>	X			
<i>Reference Committee #2</i>				#####
(*Use this space for additional narrative, if needed.)				

	<b>APPROVED</b>	<b>DISAPPROVED</b>	<b>REFER TO . . .*</b>
<b>HOD ACTION</b>			