

## Neighbor Conflicts

While most people support the concept of humanely caring for feral cats, conflict can sometimes arise. One of the best ways to prevent conflict is to ensure that the cats are spayed or neutered and feeding areas are clean and inconspicuous. Following are the most common reasons people complain about feral cats, and ideas for addressing their concerns.

- **Wild animals.** Feed cats during the day and pick up any leftover food once the cats have eaten. Other humane deterrents are described in The SF/SPCA fact sheet "Living with Urban Wildlife."
- **Kittens.** Spay/neuter will prevent more kittens from being born. In some cases, feral kittens can be socialized and adopted.
- **Spraying, fighting, howling.** Neutering quickly reduces or eliminates these behaviors. Regular and sufficient feeding will also prevent fighting.
- **Cats using yard as a litterbox.** Caregivers can place covered, sand-filled litter boxes in their yards, and/or offer to periodically clean the neighbor's yard. See "How to Keep Cats out of Your Yard" fact sheet for more information.

### Conflict Resolution

- **Listen closely and ask questions.** A person might start out by saying the cats are "bothering" them, but on further discussion reveal that cat droppings in her flower garden are the specific problem. In another case, a neighbor demanded—without explanation—that a caregiver stop feeding cats in the neighborhood. After asking several questions, she discovered the neighbor was upset because he didn't like cat footprints on his new car. To keep the peace, the caregiver bought her neighbor a car cover and he never complained again.

The person's concerns may seem reasonable, they may not, but it is important to listen respectfully and be constructive. By asking questions and offering solutions, it becomes possible to focus on the person's specific concerns rather than their generalized objections to feral cats.

- **Sit down and talk.** Calmly share your concerns with the goal of amicably resolving the problem. It can be a good idea to prepare a small packet of written materials in support of caring for feral cats. If relations are seriously strained, community mediation services may be beneficial.
- **Offer concrete solutions.** Once you have determined what the person's specific complaints are, you can address them. Give them The SF/SPCA flyer, "How to Keep Cats out of Your Yard" and explain what a cat fence is and how it works. If you haven't had the cats neutered yet, do so, and let your neighbor know how much it will improve the cats' behavior while gradually decreasing the size of the colony. Offer to keep litter boxes in your backyard for cats to use, or put a cat fence around your yard. Don't be afraid to brainstorm—creative ideas can save lives, as demonstrated by the case above.
- **Explain the value of Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) programs.** TNR is the most humane and effective way to control feral cat populations and minimize the most common concerns people raise about feral cats. Be sure to explain the ramifications of trapping the cats and taking them to an animal shelter: most will be killed since feral cats are not candidates for adoption. In

addition, more cats—probably unneutered—will move back into the area starting the cycle all over again.

**SF/SPCA Resources**

- Fact sheets including "Humane Trapping," "The Care and Feeding of Feral Cats," "Socializing Feral Kittens," and more.
- Cat Fence-In System™ brochure.
- Feral Cat Video Series.
- Lifeline for Feral Cats (415) 554-3071. We can provide advice specific to your situation.
- The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program provides free spay/neuter for San Francisco feral cats, no appointment necessary.