

Moving with your Cat

Pulling up stakes and transporting oneself and one's goods to a new address is truly a moving experience. It may even be more so for family feline, who doesn't know what it's all about – only that the owner is suddenly boxing up the books and rolling up the rugs. Indeed, to the cat it may seem the world is turning upside down, reassurances from the humans notwithstanding. Household pets thrive on routine, as do most of us, but cats are especially attached to their territory and a move can be most traumatic. For the well-being of the pet, take some precautions before, during and after the move to minimize the shock. First, long before moving day, teach the cat to come when called. Should the cat exit during the excitement or escape from the new house, calling it back may be the only hope. To teach the cat its name, simply call it and immediately reward it with a tasty bit of food. Keep doing this – across the room, across the house and then across the yard. To reinforce the training, call the cat every time you feed it so the animal will associate its name instantly with food. Statistics show that most cats travel to their new homes by car. Statistics also indicate that the drive can be the most traumatic part of the move. It's a wise idea, therefore, to accustom the cat to travel long before moving day. To do this, first get kitty used to riding in a cat carrier. Introduce the cat to an open carrier many weeks prior to a first car ride, praising the cat while inside and rewarding it when it stays there. Then experiment by closing the door for a minute or two at a time, gradually increasing confinement time and always rewarding the cat for staying calm. The goal is to make the cat feel that the carrier is home sweet home. When this is accomplished, it's simply a matter of getting the animal acclimated to the sounds and motions of the car.

As moving day dawns, keep kitty, along with its familiar toys, bed and dishes, in a separate room away from the chaos. Some people board their cats in a kennel for the day or leave it in the care of neighbors or friends. When it's kitty's turn to make the actual move, put the cat inside its carrier before leaving the house. (A lot of nervous cats have jumped from their owner's arms on the way to the car.) For some cats, the worst part of the move is not the "during," but the "after"; settling into a new environment. Don't be surprised if the animal shows behavioral changes – hiding, nervousness or lack of appetite for a few days. To ease the cat's adjustment upon arrival, keep the cat in its carrier for a few hours. Leave it in a quiet room that can be closed off from the rest of the house (although you should visit often and offer plenty of reassurance). When the carrier is opened, have the familiar litter box, toys, food and water bowls ready and waiting nearby.

After the pet feels comfortable in this room, open the door to one additional room. Once the cat feels secure here, open the door to another room, and so on. This way, the animal always knows where "home base" is and can return to it should it

feel frightened or uneasy. Depending on the temperament of the cat, it will take from a week to two months for the cat to call the place its own. But with time and lots of love, the family feline will eventually come to realize there's no place like home, wherever it may be.

This information is courtesy of the San Francisco Cat Behavior Helpline at (415) 554-3075 or catbehavior@sfpca.org.