

Flushable Litter

The future of feline waste management?

By Elisa Jordan

In some ways, cats are very humanlike. They bathe themselves. They have dignity. They have distinct preferences. Soon, it might appear that they even have a very humanlike toilet. Don't be fooled, though. That description isn't entirely accurate.

"Most people think of it like a toilet, but unlike a toilet it's self-cleaning — so it's more like an appliance," says Rick Mellinger, president of PetNovations, makers of the CatGenie, in Norristown, Pa.

"Green" is a word on many people's minds lately. "The philosophy here is to use renewable or recyclable kinds of things rather than use something once and create a permanent consequence in a landfill," Mellinger says. The box uses permanent granules that look and feel like litter, so cats can dig around like they would normally. However, instead of throwing the dirty litter away, the box washes the granules and reuses them.

Because the granules don't absorb moisture, liquids drain away from the box and everything remains odor-free. The GenieHand removes solids into a chamber in which the solids are stored temporarily, ground up and liquefied.

Then it is flushed out, either down the toilet or a drain, and the granules are washed, sanitized, deodorized and dried, Mellinger explains. "We put waste into a system that's designed to handle waste, which is the sewage system. It's handled like how human waste gets handled."

It might be difficult to imagine cat waste and human waste being treated the same way, but it's not that far of a stretch.

"To use it, you need three things: cold water supply, electrical power and a place to drain it. Typically that's in a bathroom or a laundry room," he says. "We provide the adapters to connect it. You don't need a plumber."

In other words, the pipes that carry away water from toilets and washing machines work here, as well.

The solution that cleans the granules fights bacteria and is safe for cats. The granules also are safe, both for kitties and the environment. Although the granules stay permanently in the bowl, if some stick to a solid and get into the sewer system — or get kicked out by a cat — they're designed to disintegrate.

Mellinger says that, if the granules get into the environment and an animal should ingest one, they've been treated and are digestible. "It takes about six to nine months, and then they completely disappear, which makes it safe for septic tanks," he says.

A line in the box indicates how high the granules should be in the bowl. If they ever get below that line, the company sells additional granules that cat owners can sprinkle in as needed, so "you never just dump it out and start over," Mellinger says.

"More pet-owning houses are looking for green products now. It's consistent with their lifestyles. You're seeing more cat owners who are green-oriented." Plus, he adds, "The No. 1 complaint of cat owners is the smell of the litterbox. We take care of that."