

## Cats Spraying

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, explains why cats spray.**

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**Q:** I have a 9-year-old husky cat and eight others; all are neutered or spayed. The three male cats spray anything and everything. Sometimes my husky even lifts his leg in the house. I tried an atomizer in an electrical wall socket close to the living room carpet, but he just sniffed the diffuser, turned around and sprayed on it!

How do I solve this problem? My eight cat boxes are cleaned daily. There are four cat boxes in the living room, one on the back door step area leading to the basement, and three in the basement. I understand cat behavior on why they mark territory, such as insecurity, "this area is mine," dominance, etc.

Can you give me more insight? I've practically given up. All I do is clean up, and it is a lot of work.

Help! Please give me whatever advice you have to offer!

**A:** A variety of factors trigger male cat spraying and your husky's need to leave his calling card. All of these triggers need to be addressed.

A very thorough cleanup of the sprayed areas has to be done with a really good enzyme cleaner. All enzyme cleaners are not created equal! Unfortunately there are some popular ones that aren't as effective as we would like them to be. A thorough cleanup is mandatory because cats continue to spray or urinate on areas that have not been thoroughly cleaned up. This can be a Herculean task if the urine has soaked into hard to clean areas like sofas, pillows and carpets.

Another harsh reality is that you might have too many cats for the living area. Short of finding great homes for a couple of the kitties, you can increase their living area by increasing the vertical territory. Add tall cat trees that are at least 6 feet tall, and add shelves and window perches in popular areas of the house. Installing a high shelf, approximately 18-20 inches from the ceiling around the perimeter of the room, also will help increase the vertical territory. When adding the shelves, make sure they have many access and exit points for the cats. This should help reduce some of the stress and allow the cats to demonstrate their hierarchy in a way that is acceptable to us humans with quasi-sensitive noses.

The current cat box configuration needs to be changed. Instead of the boxes being clustered together in a couple of rooms, each litterbox should be located in a different area in the house, making it next to impossible for any animal to resource guard. A cat that is resource guarding usually lies down outside of the room that contains the cat boxes. The other resident cats have to walk by the cute little cat rolling on his back in order to use the litterbox. When there is a potential difference of opinions between cats, they sometimes avoid confrontation by finding other areas to use as latrines and/or to spray.

Litterboxes need to be uncovered and placed in areas that cats easily can escape from. Closets and showers are not good locations for litterboxes, since cats easily can feel trapped in those locations.

An atomizer is not a magic bullet. It is very effective when used in conjunction with proper litterbox management, environmental changes (vertical territory) and behavior modification.