

Landlord Threatens Lawsuit Over Cat Colony

Cats in trap, neuter and release program deemed a nuisance.

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A land owner next door to a feral cat colony that animal activists maintain has threatened to sue the town of Rutland, Vt., because of property damage allegedly caused by the cats. Landlord David Searles contends that it's the city's responsibility to keep wandering cats off his property.

Last week, Searles stormed out of City Hall threatening a lawsuit.

For the past six years, Rutland has cooperated with City Cat Allies, a group trying to curb the cat population by spaying and neutering stray and feral felines. To accomplish that goal, the group has created trap-neuter-release colonies across the city where the animals are fed and group members can trap them and send them to veterinarians who spay or neuter and inoculate them. The cats are then returned to the neighborhood.

The colonies are located mostly at members' homes, but the cats visiting the colony near Searles' property have wandered away from the colony's boundaries. Searles has complained about damage to his building and droppings left on his property from the cats.

"Apparently cats have more rights than you and I. I can have the police remove someone who's trespassing on my property, but I can't get anyone to do anything about these cats," Searles reportedly said last week during a meeting of the city's Charter and Ordinance Committee.

Committee members were trying to decide whether the city's nuisance animal ordinance needed to be reworded to include cats, which are largely unmentioned in the dog-oriented ordinance. However, the aldermen couldn't come to a consensus on how to handle the animals, according to a report in the Rutland Herald newspaper.

Searles argued that the cats were creating a legal liability for him because of the chance that a child could get sick from the animals' droppings. He said that if he was sued, he'd take the city to court with him, according to the report.