Keeping Your New Cat Safe and Happy

Thank you for adopting your new feline friend from the Humane Society of Missouri. While we strongly advise that cats be kept strictly indoors, we realize that some cats may want to be outdoors at times. *For their safety, cats younger than six months old and declawed cats should always remain inside. Since our cats are adopted out as companion animals, they should spend the majority of their time inside with their family.* If you still want to allow your cat outside, please consider the following risks and precautions.

DISEASES

It is important to us that you adopt a healthy new pet. Before going home, your pet has been vaccinated for several diseases. However, there are many illnesses a cat may encounter while outdoors for which they have not been vaccinated or no vaccination exists. Such illnesses include upper respiratory infections, feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency viral infections. While some of these diseases are treatable, others may be life-threatening to both the cat and other pets.

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

While indoor-only cats are constantly protected from the environment, cats who are allowed outdoors are often exposed to many environmental risks.

Weather can often change quickly and an indoor/outdoor cat may unexpectedly find themselves in the middle of a heat wave or snowstorm. In the winter, cats often climb under car hoods in an effort to get warm, where they can be seriously injured or even killed when unsuspecting owners turn on their vehicle. In the summer months, cats may suffer from heat stroke or dehydration due to hot temperatures.

Indoor/outdoor cats are also exposed to other dangerous animals. Dogs, coyotes, foxes, owls, hawks, snakes and even other cats all pose significant risks to your pet.

Traffic in busy neighborhoods can also pose a threat to a cat outside. Even a "street savvy" cat can be frightened into traffic if chased.

Parasites are also a concern for pet owners of indoor/outdoor cats. Fleas, ticks and ear mites can all be encountered outside, as can ringworm, which can be transmitted to humans and other pets. Please keep your pet up-to-date on their monthly flea and tick preventative and periodically check your pet's ears and skin to make sure they are not being bothered by parasites.

Owners of indoor/outdoor cats also need to be aware of dangerous toxins in their area. Pesticides, mouse poisons and antifreeze all pose serious threats to your pet. If ingested,

these toxins can often be fatal. Please remember to store all chemicals and other possible toxins in a safe area away from all pets and make sure your animals are not allowed in areas where these chemicals are kept, such as a garage or shed. In cases of mouse poison, cats that eat mice that have ingested the poison can be affected, even if they do not eat the poison itself.

HUMANS

Unfortunately, your indoor/outdoor cat may be considered a pest by some people simply by being outside. Neighbors may become annoyed at cats left unattended that roam into their yards and eliminate in inappropriate areas. A well-meaning person may consider your cat a stray and decide to keep them as their own pet. Or your cat may become disoriented and lost, unable to find their way home. Sadly, human beings are often the cruelest predator for even the most loving animals. Cats, especially those that are friendly and accustomed to people, can suffer terribly if they meet the wrong person.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- *The best thing you can do for your cat is to keep him/her inside.* From many years of experience, animal welfare organizations have learned that cats are safest and live the longest if kept strictly indoors. Both the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Academy of Feline Practitioners recommend that cats be kept indoors. If you elect to let your cat outside, please take the following precautions.

- *If your cat ventures out, stay with them to ensure their safety.* This will eliminate many of the risks your cat faces. If you can't directly supervise the cat at all times, consider purchasing or constructing an escape-proof enclosure or fitting your cat with a harness and going outside for a walk. Never leave an unattended animal tethered outside on a leash.

- *Make sure your cat is up-to-date on all vaccinations and medications, including rabies and their monthly flea and tick preventative*. Talk to your veterinarian about additional vaccinations your cat may need before allowing them outside. You may also want to discuss the risks an indoor/outdoor cat may pose to your other pets.

- *Ensure your cat always has access to a litter box, fresh water and adequate shelter*.

- *Purchase toys to stimulate and exercise your cat indoors*, such as jingly balls, scratching posts and a climbing tree.

- *Check that your cat is wearing identification at all times and has a microchip*.

- *Research any "care and control" ordinances in your municipality*.

Humane Society of Missouri

For more information about indoor/outdoor cats, please visit www.hsmo.org. Thank you for your support.