



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of STATE PUBLIC HEALTH VETERINARIANS, INC.

Free-Roaming/Unowned/Feral Cats

Position Statement

The National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians

September, 1996

Issue: By definition, "feral" cats are introduced, established, non-native species. The impact of these animals on human public health is defined by zoonotic diseases including rabies and other bite infections, bartonellosis, plague, larval migrans, and toxoplasmosis. Additionally, free-roaming cats may be responsible for the decline in native species of birds, reptiles and small mammals, and may be associated with increased risk of disease for pets (e.g., transmission of feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus). In attempts to avoid depopulation to control these risks, colonies of feral cats are sometimes maintained with neutering and vaccination. However, no evidence exists that maintained cat colonies adequately reduce human public health risks or appropriately address their impact on pets or native wildlife. Several reports suggest that support of "managed cat colonies" may increase the public's likelihood of abandoning unwanted pets in lieu of more responsible options.

Whereas the benefits of the human/animal bond are recognized, and whereas the maintenance of free-roaming/unowned/feral cats can be detrimental to public and environmental health, the NASPHV:

1. Acknowledges there are potential human public health risks associated with free-roaming/unowned/feral cats. There is no evidence that colony management programs will reduce diseases such as bartonellosis, larval migrans, toxoplasmosis, and vector-borne zoonotic diseases. Rabies will also continue to be a risk, as such colonies are not closed.
2. Supports actions by local health departments, humane societies, and animal control groups in reducing the numbers of stray animals to minimize the impact of abandoned and/or feral cats.
3. Is concerned that managed cat colonies may foster irresponsible cat ownership and will promote the free-roaming of owned cats.
4. Encourages the timely neutering, regular veterinary care and maintenance of owned cats inside owners' homes.