

Frequently Asked Questions About TNR

What is trap/neuter/return?

Trap/neuter/return is a humane, non-lethal alternative to trap and kill ...

Trap/neuter/return (TNR) is a comprehensive management plan in which homeless, free-roaming (community) cats are humanely trapped, evaluated and sterilized by a licensed veterinarian, vaccinated against rabies, and then returned to their original habitat.

What is the primary benefit of TNR?

In the long term, TNR lowers the numbers of cats in the community more effectively than trap and kill ...

Good Samaritans in neighborhoods all across the country provide food, water and shelter for community cats and TNR provides a non-lethal, humane way to effectively manage these community cat populations. In some programs, friendly cats or young kittens are customarily pulled from the colony and sent to foster facilities for socialization and, eventually, placement into forever homes. Stopping the breeding and removing some cats for adoption are more effective than trap and kill in lowering the numbers of cats in a community long-term.

What are the other benefits of TNR?

The benefits to both cats and communities are numerous ...

There are numerous benefits to TNR. For instance, TNR significantly reduces shelter admissions and operating costs. These programs also create safer communities and promote public health by reducing the number of unvaccinated cats. TNR programs also improve the lives of free-roaming cats: When males are neutered, they are no longer compelled to maintain a large territory or fight over mates, and females are no longer forced to endure the physical and mental demands of giving birth and fending for their young. Additionally, fewer community cats in shelters increases shelter adoption rates as more cage space opens up for adoptable cats. Furthermore, sterilizing community cats curtails population growth while alleviating nuisances.

Another beneficial component to TNR is the impact these programs have on animal control officers and shelter workers. Job satisfaction among these workers increases tremendously when the job does not entail unnecessarily destroying healthy animals for the purpose of convenience. This increased job satisfaction results in less employee turnover and an overall improved public image of the shelter itself. The reduction in euthanasia and animal admissions also provides more time for staff and volunteers to care for resident animals and give personal attention to potential adopters.

Equally important, TNR programs allow animal control facilities to take advantage of numerous resources typically unavailable to shelters that employ traditional trap-and-kill policies. Understandably, people are rarely inclined to volunteer for programs that fail to make

them feel good about themselves. Through the implementation of TNR, volunteers know they are making a difference in the lives of the animals, and the community is benefiting from their charitable efforts. Volunteers can help trap cats and also assist animal control in locating other cats in need of TNR services. Commonly referred to as caregivers, these volunteers also feed and monitor the health of the individual cats and the colony, when applicable, once the cats are returned. Frequent monitoring is an invaluable component of successful TNR programs because caregivers can easily identify new cats who join the colony so they, too, can be sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped. Another component of a well-managed TNR program is the collection of critical data that can be used to seek grant funding for expansion of current TNR programs.

What happens if you trap an owned pet cat?

All unidentified cats who roam off their property are treated equally ...

TNR volunteers and/or veterinarians will typically examine all incoming cats for owner identification. In most programs, unidentified animals are treated as if they are part of the TNR program and are physically evaluated, sterilized, vaccinated, ear-tipped and returned to their territory, where they can easily be reunited with their owners. Sterilizing owned cats who roam off their property and frequent community cat colonies is an important component to the success of any TNR program, since all free-roaming, unsterilized cats contribute to the overpopulation problem.

Why is TNR preferable to lethal control?

TNR is a practical solution to the failed trap-and-kill policy ...

Lethal control has been used for more than three decades, and given the current problem of large populations of free-roaming cats, it is obvious that killing as a form of animal control does not work. Equally important, killing homeless animals as a means of population control is publicly unpalatable. By contrast, TNR puts an end to this perpetual cycle of death and makes it possible to maintain a colony at a relatively stable number of sterilized cats, who are unable to breed and multiply.

Why does the trap-and-kill method fail to curtail free-roaming cat populations?

Populations rebound to previous levels following trap and kill ...

Every habitat has a carrying capacity or, more specifically, a maximum species population size that can be sustained in that habitat. This carrying capacity is determined by the availability of food sources, water, shelter, and other environmental necessities. When a portion of the sustainable population is permanently removed and the availability of resources is unaltered, the remaining animals respond through increased birthing and higher survivability rates. Because of this biological certainty, trapping and removing cats from any given area does little more than ensure that the cat population will rebound to the same level as before, necessitating additional trapping and killing. While lethal control may arguably rid an area of

cats temporarily, it is not an effective long-term solution because new cats will quickly fill the vacated area and breed, resulting in a perpetual cycle of killing.

What is the actual cost savings of TNR over the traditional trap-and-kill method of animal control?

Communities can save taxpayer money with TNR ...

The city of Jacksonville, Florida, is a fine example of an area that has capitalized on non-lethal alternatives for controlling free-roaming cats. Over a three-year period (2007-2010), Jacksonville saved approximately 13,000 lives and \$160,000. Equally important, feline nuisance complaints decreased during this period.

The Feral Fix Program in Salt Lake City, Utah, has also proven to be quite successful. From 2008 to 2010, Salt Lake City's "save rate" of cats improved 40.4 percent, equaling a total cost savings of approximately \$65,000. Shelter cat intake for the years 2009-2010 decreased 21.8 percent. During this same period, there was no increase in feline nuisance complaints.

Communities can save money with TNR, but the cost savings are undoubtedly location-specific and involve taking into account numerous variables for an accurate calculation. The immediate savings many communities experience are a result of tapping into volunteer support and other resources (e.g., private donations) that come from implementing a humane TNR program. Cost savings fluctuate based on the type of TNR program implemented, the extent of animal control involvement, the volunteer base available and the community's support of TNR programs. The point that needs to be stressed, however, is that over time, through attrition and sterilization efforts, fewer cats will be breeding and contributing to the population growth. Fewer live animals to contend with inevitably means a decrease in the demand on taxpayer dollars.

Until a TNR program begins, it is difficult to calculate accurately how much money will be saved. However, other benefits are equally important. A successful TNR program can improve the public image of a town, which may add to economic development. Employee satisfaction within the shelter and animal control facilities is also a huge asset and contributes to a positive image of the community. The hometown pride and enthusiasm generated from supporting a non-lethal, practical and effective solution to a community problem must be factored into the equation, even though it doesn't provide precise numbers in terms of cost savings.

Are there any tools to help keep community cats out of designated areas?

Non-lethal deterrents for cats are effective and easily accessible ...

There are numerous cat deterrents available on the market today. The following YouTube video discusses each one of these products: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avTQbP0BtII>.

Why are feeding bans ineffective?

It's bad public policy to criminalize kindness ...

Feeding bans are notoriously ineffective primarily because they are impossible to enforce. Also, human nature rarely allows someone to sit idly by while an animal suffers. When a starving animal appears, compassion prevails. Consequently, people will not adhere to an ordinance discouraging the feeding of animals in need, and criminalizing kindness is just bad public policy.

Hungry cats can continue to reproduce, which further undermines the intent of most feeding prohibitions. Equally important, feeding bans jeopardize the ongoing sterilization and vaccination services provided by caregivers who diligently maintain and monitor cat colonies in the community. It is also important to note that once feeding by humans is prohibited, hungry cats are forced to physically compete with wildlife over available, natural food sources.

What about liability to the towns or municipalities that implement a TNR program?

There could be liability for towns or municipalities that DON'T implement TNR programs ...

Many free-roaming cats are unsocialized and tend to avoid people whenever possible. This lack of human contact minimizes the likelihood of liability or negligence that may result from human exposure. Also, in a TNR program, community cats are vaccinated against rabies so the probability of a person being severely injured is quite remote.

Liability should not be an issue for towns or municipalities that implement TNR programs for the purpose of reducing cat populations, protecting public health through vaccination efforts, or resolving nuisance complaints. These are all state interests worthy of government involvement. Also, animal owners are responsible for any alleged damage caused by their animals' activities or behavior. In the case of community cats, there are no owners, so there is nowhere for liability to be placed.

The question that often comes up when the issue of liability is raised is this: What happens if a town fails to adopt a TNR program, and a child gets bitten by an unvaccinated, free-roaming cat? Is the town then liable because it rejected TNR, since this failure to act may be deemed negligence? Again, it can be argued that the cat is not owned; however, the obvious concern in this scenario is that the outcome can potentially be far more tragic.

What are the advantages of adopting a TNR ordinance?

An ordinance grants credibility to any TNR program ...

When crafted properly, a TNR ordinance establishes reasonable standards and defines duties for those individuals instrumental in implementing a community cat program. This type of legislation grants credibility to TNR, promotes community involvement and encourages community cat caregiver cooperation. Equally important, well-crafted legislation will insulate community cats from licensing requirements, feeding bans, pet limits, or other punitive laws that

often impede the progress of sterilization efforts and public health protection. Grant funding is available for TNR programs, specifically in those situations where TNR ordinances have been adopted, as this legal assurance speaks volumes about the level of community support and involvement.

How serious of a threat are cats to bird populations?

TNR means fewer cats, which means fewer threats to birds. Other factors pose more serious threats to bird populations ...

According to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Web page entitled "Threats to Native Birds" (birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/conservation/planning/threats), the largest threat to birds is loss (or degradation) of habitat, which results from human development and agriculture. Other significant hazards to bird populations include chemical toxins and direct exploitation from hunting and capturing birds for pets.

There are no studies that show conclusively that pet cats are responsible for declines in wildlife populations. In fact, according to Yolanda van Heezik, who wrote "A New Zealand Perspective" (*The Wildlife Professional*, Spring 2011), "It's unclear as to what extent declines of wildlife can be attributed to cats versus other human-related modifications to landscapes." Although no studies support the misleading claims that cats are destroying songbird populations, there's no disputing that cats do in fact kill birds. The point that must be highlighted, however, is that fewer cats mean less bird predation. That being the case, TNR should not be condemned because of potential wildlife predation, but rather embraced so that free-roaming populations can be curtailed as efficiently as possible to minimize potential predatory behavior.

Why have TNR programs become so popular?

Trapping and killing homeless animals is ineffective in reducing free-roaming populations ...

TNR programs are being adopted by towns and municipalities across the nation out of necessity and good common sense. As evidenced by three decades of trapping and killing, lethal means for controlling homeless animal populations is not the answer. This paradigm shift is being seen on many municipal levels as budgets continue to be slashed in the animal control industry. This evident need for better tools to handle animal control issues has led to a philosophical shift in the animal control industry itself. In fact, according to Mark Kumpf, 2010 president of the National Animal Control Association, "The cost for picking up and simply euthanizing and disposing of animals is horrendous, in both the philosophical and the economic sense." The entire article from which his quote is drawn can be found here: animalsheltering.org/resource_library/magazine_articles/sep_oct_2008/broader_view_of_cats.pdf

Does TNR encourage the abandonment of cats?

Cats will be abandoned with or without TNR ...

Unfortunately, cat abandonment does occur. In fact, cats have been abandoned for as long as people have had pet cats, which is why TNR is necessary today. These periodic abandonments, however, will not derail the overall success of a TNR program because cat colonies can absorb the occasional newcomer yet still show a significant population reduction when the majority of the animals are sterilized.

It's also important to stress that maintaining a local TNR colony is likely not the determining factor behind whether someone abandons a pet or not. Surely there are a variety of other issues that factor into this irresponsible behavior. However, efforts should be made to place feeding stations in out-of-the-way locations to minimize the likelihood of desperate people illegally abandoning their pet cats. Other strategies should also be employed to further reduce potential abandonment, such as posting signs about abandonment ordinances at high-profile cat colonies.

Do cats pose a risk to public health?

Humans contracting a disease from a cat is quite unlikely ...

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, people are not likely “to get sick from touching or owning a cat.” As stressed above, free-roaming cats tend to avoid human contact. This natural avoidance of humans makes the likelihood of disease transmission quite remote. The CDC also provides simple health tips to minimize potential exposure, such as washing hands with soap and water after touching feces or after being scratched or bitten. The agency also recommends that cats be vaccinated against rabies — which is a key component to most TNR programs.

Rabies and toxoplasmosis are two diseases often raised during discussions about free-roaming cats. It's important that both of these serious human health threats be put into proper perspective. According to the CDC website, rabies in cats is extremely rare (cdc.gov/rabies/location/usa/surveillance/domestic_animals.html). In fact, only about 1 percent of the cats tested in 2009 tested positive. Also, out of the four rabies cases reported to the CDC in 2009, none of them involved cats. The possibility of humans contracting toxoplasmosis from cats is also quite minimal. In fact, according to the CDC, “People are probably more likely to get toxoplasmosis from gardening or eating raw meat.”

Do free-roaming cats live short, brutal lives?

Free-roaming cats can live long, healthy lives ...

Free-roaming cats often live long, healthy lives. According to a study conducted by Dr. Julie Levy (Levy, Gale and Gale, 2003) at the University of Central Florida, the majority of cats (83 percent) in the 11 cat colonies studied were present on the campus for more than six years. It's quite likely that many of the observed cats far exceeded that life span, since approximately one-half of the free-roaming cats first observed in the study were already adults, so their true ages were unknown. Furthermore, according to Levy, the body weights of free-roaming cats,

when compared with pet cats in previous studies, found “no significant differences” and “commonly, free-roaming cats were in adequate body condition.” Also, similar to owned cats, neutering free-roaming cats resulted in an increase in body weight and overall body condition.

The findings regarding the health of free-roaming cats were quite similar in other studies. For instance, during the years 1993 to 2004, seven TNR organizations throughout the nation collected data on 103,643 free-roaming cats examined in spay/neuter clinics. Less than 1 percent of these animals needed to be euthanized because of debilitating conditions, trauma or infectious diseases (Wallace and Levy, 2006). The one program that tested for FeLV and FIV reported an overall infection rate of 5.2 percent, which is similar to previous studies that reported results for both pet and feral cats.

Why is the Utah Community Cat Act so significant?

Utah towns and municipalities are now empowered to implement humane and cost-effective policies to control free-roaming cat populations ...

Utah’s Community Cat Act, adopted in 2011, is a significant piece of legislation that allows towns and municipalities to implement humane and effective policies to control free-roaming cat populations. The Community Cat Act defines a community cat as “a feral or free-roaming cat that is without visibly discernable or microchip owner identification of any kind, and has been sterilized, vaccinated and ear-tipped.” This act provides legal protection to caregivers and sponsors by stipulating that they do not have “custody” of the animals. Consequently, returning cats to their original habitat following sterilization cannot be construed as abandonment.

This legislation also exempts community cats from licensing requirements and feeding bans, providing yet another level of legal protection to the good Samaritans who care for them. Equally important, cats who are eligible for a community cat program are exempt from the mandatory five-day hold period, which is a significant cost savings for animal shelters and taxpayers alike. This provision is also invaluable to the health of free-roaming cats, who customarily endure a great deal of unnecessary stress while housed in shelter environments.

What provisions of a local ordinance are most harmful to community cats and TNR caregivers?

Legal protection is needed for both free-roaming cats and the individuals who provide this invaluable community service ...

Many towns, dissatisfied with the inefficiency of trap-and-kill programs, are turning to TNR as a humane alternative for dealing with free-roaming cat populations. Unfortunately, current laws often conflict with this well-intentioned plan. For instance, broad definitions of “owner” may include anyone who feeds an animal for a short period of time, inadvertently targeting community cat caregivers. If legally construed as an “owner,” a caregiver who manages a large colony may find herself in violation of restrictive pet limits and cost-prohibitive cat licensing requirements. Of equal concern, caregivers, if deemed owners, may be in violation of running-at-

large provisions, despite the fact that the animal was at-large when the caregiver first began caring for the unowned cat.

Poorly crafted ordinances may create other legal obstacles to caregivers who actively participate in TNR programs. This is especially true in communities where animal control interprets the return of a sterilized cat to his/her original place of capture as “abandonment.” To alleviate the negative legal consequences, towns that implement progressive TNR programs should revise current ordinances so that community cats, and the generous caregivers who support these homeless animals, are exempted from these burdensome provisions.