

Which household cleaners are safe to use in free ranging areas

Household cleaners come in all colors and fragrances, but are there some that work better than others and, more importantly, are there any that can be harmful to cats? Read Dr Ellis' response to find out!

Question:

We are a small no-kill shelter (about 300 cats and 300 dogs per year). One of our board of directors attended a conference about cat cleaning protocols and was informed that Pine Sol is not safe for use in free ranging cat areas. We have been using Spic and Span for the last 4 years, but are struggling to find it in stores near us. What other cleaning products (detergents) are safe for daily use in free ranging cat rooms in a shelter setting? We are looking for a product easily obtained at our local stores.

Thank you for your assistance!

Answer:

Hi!

Thank you for reaching out to us, it is true that phenol-containing cleaners can be toxic to cats and their use is not recommended. Many of these products will have the suffix '-sol' in the name, but when in doubt, it is a good idea to read the ingredient list and the Safety Data Sheet (available online). Some, but not all, formulations of Lysol contain a phenol. I would also advise against products that contain strong fragrances or essential oils (Pine Oil) as they can cause irritation. The original formulation of Pine Sol contained a very high percentage of pine oil and for this reason toxicity was a concern. The product has since been reformulated and pine oil is no longer an ingredient unless specially ordered. Be sure to check the label of any product.

There are many good cleaners/detergents available and most will work in

a similar manner. It is important to remember that the goal of cleaning is removing as much organic material (feces, secretions, hairs, etc.) as possible. One of the safest and simplest options is a solution of dish soap and water. This combination typically requires a rinsing step. Quaternary ammoniums, such as Spic and Span® and Fantastik®, will work well for this intended purpose, but we tend to shy away from them as their use can cause clinical signs mimicking infectious diseases (ulcerations, nasal and ocular discharge, etc.) Be sure to follow label instructions for any cleaners and no pets should come in contact with treated areas after use until dry.

An important recommendation for all cleaning products, is to make sure to not spray them in vicinity of animals, whether in cages or in a room as the particles in suspension can cause irritation and adverse reactions. In case of doubt, the product should be applied directly to a rag and then used to clean the desired surface. We highly recommend doing daily spot cleaning, as it greatly reduces stress in cats on top of saving valuable employee time. This means cleaning only the dirty areas instead of doing a systematic room breakdown every day. More in-depth cleaning can be done according to the protocol below.

We recommend a final step in the sanitation protocol, which is disinfection. This step allows us to eliminate pathogens (viruses, ringworm, etc.) that would not be inactivated by detergents and may not have been removed by mechanical cleaning alone. Disinfection does not need to be done every day, but it is good practice to disinfect housing units (cages or rooms) between animals, all high-risk areas, such as counter tops and window sills, at least once a week and to schedule a deep clean monthly. We recommend working with an “all-in-all-out” protocol where disinfection can be done between each group of cats. It is important to remember that a good mechanical cleaning is needed before disinfection because organic material can inactivate a disinfecting agent.

An effective product that we recommend is accelerated hydrogen peroxide (Rescue™) which can act both as a cleaner as well as a disinfecting agent. At appropriate concentrations, it can deactivate viruses such as parvovirus and calicivirus as well as ringworm (4-8 ounces per gallon depending on pathogen targeting), which cleaners will not affect. Although possibly more expensive than regular household products, it can be mixed at a lower concentration of 2 ounces per gallon for everyday

cleaning use, making it last much longer. This product isn't available in supermarkets, but can be easily ordered through online retailers.

A single sanitation protocol might not apply in every situation; cleaning protocols for kittens might vary from adults and will be different for long term, group housed animals and animals housed in kennels for short stays. Each shelter may also have a different incidence of infectious disease which should be taken into consideration. In the event of a disease outbreak, protocols should be reviewed and modified as needed to best address the situation.

I highly recommend reading our sanitation information sheet that gives much more in-depth explanations on cleaning, disinfecting as well as sanitation protocols:

<http://www.uwsheltermedicine.com//library/resources/sanitation-in-animal-shelters>

If you would like more information on any specific product, sanitation protocols or for any other question, please feel free to write back to us!

Sincerely,

Alex Ellis, DVM

Maddie's Fund Shelter Medicine Resident

Shelter Medicine Program

University of Wisconsin – School of Veterinary Medicine