

Removing Pet Stains and Odors

You know how it goes: The minute you turn your back, your pet decides that your new carpet is the perfect place to relieve himself. You clean and clean, but you can't get rid of that smell. What can you do?

Well, for starters, you need to find which areas are soiled and then retrain your pet to avoid eliminating in those areas. And to do that, you'll have to clean those areas, and clean them well. Here are the steps you'll need to take:

- Find all soiled areas using your nose and eyes. A blacklight bulb will usually show even old urine stains. Turn out all lights in the room, use the black light to identify soiled areas, and lightly outline the areas with chalk. Black lights are available for rent through the Larimer Humane Society.
- Clean the soiled areas appropriately to remove the odors.
- Rule out medical causes for the behavior by visiting your veterinarian.
- Figure out why your pet is urinating or defecating in inappropriate areas. (For help, see our tips sheets "Solving Litter Box Problems," "Housetraining Your Puppy," and "Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats." These tips sheets can be found at www.larimerhumane.org.)
- Make the areas unattractive or unavailable. (For help, see our help sheets on dog aversives and cat aversives. These help sheets can be found at www.larimerhumane.org.)
- Make the appropriate "bathroom" area attractive. (For help, see our help sheets "Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise," "Housetraining Your Puppy," and "Solving Litter Box Problems." These help sheets can be found at www.larimerhumane.org.)
- Teach your pet the appropriate place to eliminate by using positive reinforcement techniques.
- To be successful, you need to follow all these steps. If you fail to completely clean the area, your retraining efforts will be useless. As long as your pet can smell his personal scent, he'll continue to return to the "accident zone." Even if you can't smell traces of urine, your pet can. Your most important chore is to remove (neutralize) that odor with the following steps.

To Clean Washable Items

Machine wash as usual, adding a one-pound box of baking soda to your regular detergent. It's best to air dry these items if possible. If you can still see the stain or smell the urine, machine wash the item again and add an enzymatic cleaner (available at pet supply stores) that breaks down pet waste odors. Be sure to follow the directions carefully.

If your pet urinates or defecates on the sheets or blankets on a bed, cover the bed with a vinyl, flannel-backed tablecloth when you begin the retraining period. It's machine washable, inexpensive, and unattractive to your pet.

To Clean Carpeted Areas and Upholstery

For new stains that are still wet, soak up as much of the urine as possible with a combination of newspaper and paper towels. The more fresh urine you can remove before it dries, especially from carpet, the easier it will be to remove the odor. Place a thick layer of paper towels on the wet spot and cover that with a thick layer of newspaper. If possible, put newspaper under the soiled area as well. Stand on this padding for about a minute. Remove the padding and repeat the process until the area is barely damp.

If possible, put the fresh, urine-soaked paper towel in the area where it belongs—your cat's litter box or your dog's designated outdoor "bathroom area." This will help remind your pet that eliminating isn't a "bad" behavior as long as it's done in the right place.

Rinse the "accident zone" thoroughly with clean, cool water. After rinsing, remove as much of the water as possible by blotting or by using a "wet vac."

For Stains That Have Already Set

To remove all traces of heavy stains in carpeting, consider renting an extractor or wet vac from a local hardware store. This machine operates much like a vacuum cleaner and is efficient and economical. Extracting/wet vac machines do the best job of forcing clean water through your carpet and then forcing the dirty water back out again. When using these machines or cleaners, be sure to follow the instructions carefully. Don't use any chemicals with these machines; they work much more effectively with plain water.

Once the area is really clean, use a high-quality pet odor neutralizer available at pet supply stores. Be sure to read and follow the cleaner's directions for use, including testing the cleaner on a small, hidden portion of fabric first to be sure it doesn't stain.

If the area still looks stained after it's completely dry from extracting and neutralizing, try any good carpet stain remover.

Avoid using steam cleaners to clean urine odors from carpet or upholstery. The heat will permanently set the stain and the odor by bonding the protein into any man-made fibers.

Avoid using cleaning chemicals, especially those with strong odors such as ammonia or vinegar. From your pet's perspective, these don't effectively eliminate or cover the urine odor and may actually encourage your pet to reinforce the urine scent mark in that area.

If you've previously used cleaners or chemicals of any kind on the area, then neutralizing cleaners won't be effective until you've rinsed every trace of the old cleaner from the carpet. Even if you haven't used chemicals recently, any trace of a non-protein-based substance will weaken the effect of the enzymatic cleaner. The cleaner will use up its "energy" on the old cleaners instead of on the protein stains you want removed.

If urine has soaked down into the padding underneath your carpet, your job will be more difficult. In some cases, you may need to take the drastic step of removing and replacing that portion of the carpet and padding.

To Clean Walls and Floors

If the wood on your furniture, walls, baseboard, or floor is discolored, the varnish or paint has reacted to the acid in the urine. You may need to remove and replace the layer of varnish or

paint. If you do so, make sure the new product is safe for pets. Employees at your local hardware or home improvement store can help you identify and match your needs with appropriate removers and replacements. Washable enamel paints and some washable wallpapers may respond favorably to enzymatic cleaners. Read the instructions carefully before using these products and test them in an invisible area.

Retrain Your Pet

Finally, in conjunction with cleaning, be sure to teach your pet where you want him to eliminate. To do this, make the "accident zone" unattractive and the appropriate "bathroom" area attractive, and see our related tip sheets at www.larimerhumane.org. The retraining period may take a week or more. Remember, it took time to build the bad habit, and it will take time to replace that habit with a new, more acceptable behavior. Treat your pet with patience and give him lots of encouragement!

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado. ©2000 Dumb Friends League and ©2003 The HSUS. All rights reserved.

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