

# Humane Cage Trapping of Cats



Trapped cat, with the trap covered to keep the cat calm

Photo by Petrina Duncan, Arid Recovery

**Cats are valued members of many families across South Australia, but some cats can cause nuisance in their neighbourhoods. Often these cats are homeless or wild, sick or injured, and it can be in the cat's best interest for them to be caught and taken to a shelter.**

Most councils offer a cat trap hire service to their residents. Traps can also be purchased or hired from the Animal Welfare League and the RSPCA. This Information Sheet sets out basic guidelines for humane cat trapping and highlights many of the welfare concerns associated with using cat traps and transporting cats once caught.

## **Duty of care when trapping cats**

While using cage traps to catch cats is legal in South Australia there is a duty of care when attempting to catch a nuisance cat. Failure to monitor a cat trap or treat a trapped cat humanely can result in legal action under the *Animal Welfare Act, 1985*.

## **General information**

In South Australia, under the *Dog and Cat Management Act, 1995* (the Act), property owners and occupiers may legally trap cats when they trespass on their properties. If a cat is identified, by either a collar with an identification tag or an "M" tattooed in their ear, it must be released or returned to the owner as it is an offence under the Act to detain an owned, identified cat.

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If you do trap an unidentified cat then you must deliver it within 12 hours to an authorised animal management officer with your local council, the RSPCA, the Animal Welfare League, the South East Animal Welfare League or a registered veterinary surgeon.

Do not release the cat into the wild as it is an offence to abandon/ release a cat under the *Animal Welfare Act, 1985* and the *Natural Resources Management Act, 2004*.

## Equipment and baits

Any method of trapping cats must be humane. The preferred trap is a rectangular wire cage that is operated by the cat touching a metal plate on the floor of the trap which activates a hinged swing-style door to close. It is illegal to use steel jawed traps and these traps are not suitable for the purpose of trapping cats in any situation. Penalties apply for setting and using these types of traps under the *Animal Welfare Act, 1985*.

It is preferable that hook operated cat traps are not used for trapping cats as the 'hook', used to hold the bait, can injure a cat that has been caught, especially if the cat is wearing a collar.

If it is necessary to use a hook operated trap then the trap should be checked more often to reduce the risk of injury to a trapped cat or other animal.

The term bait is not to be confused with poisoned bait. The term 'bait' is the lure or food used to get the cat to enter the trap.



Hook trap (left) and floor plate trap (right) Photo by Leigh Hyland/RSPCA

Oily, fish-based baits are considered the best lure for cat trapping. Cooked chicken or other meat on the bone is not appropriate as bait as it can injure the cat if ingested. The use of poisoned bait would constitute an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act, 1985*.

## Setting the trap

When undertaking trapping the following steps are recommended:

1. Feeding program – start by offering food over two or three nights in the area where you intend to set the trap to ensure the cat is willing to take the food.
2. Free feed in the trap – lock or wire open the trap and place the food inside the trap for two or three nights so that the cat becomes familiar with entering the trap.
3. Set trap – place the food that you have been using during the free feed program at the end of the trap furthest from the opening, and set the plate to operate the trap when a cat enters. Set traps must be monitored daily, but preferably morning and evening, to ensure that identified cats are set free and unidentified trapped cats are transported to a shelter or vet as quickly as possible.

## Do not

- Do not place the trap on top of a roof, an embankment or on a slippery surface;
- Do not place the trap in direct sunlight and remember that shaded spots change throughout the day;
- Do not set the trap on days that are likely to exceed 27°C or when rain is expected, as these extremes of weather will affect your success in trapping and may cause stress for the cats when trapped;
- Do not place a trap in an area where other animals can have access to or harass a trapped cat.

## **Monitor the trap**

When cats are caught in a trap they are likely to be stressed, even if it is for a short time. Ensure you are able to regularly check the trap during the day. At night, check the trap prior to going to sleep and first thing in the morning. Set the trap only when you will be able to check the trap at regular intervals.

Ensure you wear appropriate gloves whilst handling a caged cat. Cat claws can protrude through the mesh and strike hands / fingers.

Once a cat is caught, cover the trap with a blanket, tarp or something similar, leaving the ends exposed for ventilation or remove the trap to a sheltered area where people, pets or other animals can not harass the cat. Many cats, even owned cats, can become very stressed while trapped and may take some time to calm down.

Transport the cat in the trap to an Animal Welfare League or RSPCA animal shelter or vet within 12 hours.

If there is a short delay (ie an hour or two) in your ability to transfer the cat to the shelter, provide the cat with clean, cool water in a bowl, in the cage - this is vital on hot days. Do not give the cat milk as a majority of cats are lactose intolerant.

If the cat is injured ensure you take the cat to a shelter or vet as quickly as possible for prompt treatment.

The trap must be cleaned between catching cats to ensure no diseases are transferred from one trapped cat to another. Use a disinfectant that does not contain Phenol as cats are highly sensitive to this chemical.

## **Accidental trapping of other animals**

There is a chance that while setting a trap to catch a cat, you may catch another animal such as a possum or bird. This is another reason for the need to be vigilant in inspecting the trap. Using cage traps allows you to release these animals immediately on identifying that you have caught an animal other than a cat. If the animal is injured you will need to seek veterinary advice before releasing the animal.

## **Transporting trapped cats**

Trapped cats must be transported directly to an animal shelter or vet.

Be careful not to slide the cat trap on the back seat of the car or floor of the cargo area as the trapped cat's paws may get caught through the mesh floor of the trap. Cover the trap with an old blanket or towel to provide a darkened area for the cat. This will help to reduce stress on the cat while being transported. To further reduce stress for the trapped cat and the chance of disease transfer, do not transport a trapped cat with other pets.

When transporting the cat in a car, ensure the rear seat or cargo area is covered to protect the car from urine and faeces. Ensure the cat trap cannot slide by anchoring the trap with a seat belt or similar.

When transporting the cat in a utility or van ensure the cage is restrained to prevent it from sliding in the cargo area. After you remove the trap and cat from the cargo area, clean the cargo area with a non-Phenol based disinfectant. Disinfecting the cargo area reduces the chance of disease transfer to future trapped cats, your own pets and zoonoses (diseases that can be transferred between animals and humans).

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A homeless kitten with cat flu.

Photo by Leigh Hyland/RSPCA

## Cats and disease

Cats can be carriers of zoonoses which cause diseases such as Toxoplasmosis.

Toxoplasmosis can be a serious issue for pregnant women, as the disease can cause deformities in foetuses. Pregnant women should not trap or handle a trapped cat. If contact cannot be avoided then pregnant women must ensure they wear gloves while handling a trapped cat and immediately after handling wash their hands with warm water and disinfectant. Pregnant women handling cats should always avoid hand to mouth contact and wash their hands thoroughly after handling any cat.

## Outcome of trapping a cat

An Animal Welfare League or RSPCA animal shelter or vet will make an assessment of the trapped cat's condition, temperament and any injuries. An animal shelter will make a decision on the suitability of the cat for re-homing.

## Endorsed by the **Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.**

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## Identified owned cats

Cats implanted with a microchip may be impounded at a shelter for approximately 3 working days to give the owner an opportunity to reclaim the cat. The Shelter will contact the owner to advise them of the impounding of their cat and where it can be collected. The owner maybe required to pay the daily holding fee.

It is an offence under the Act to alter or remove identification from a cat.

## Unidentified cats

Un-identified but obviously owned cats will be impounded for approximately 3 days, to give the owner an opportunity to reclaim the cat. If the owner fails to collect the cat then the animal shelter can legally re-home or euthanase the cat.

The animal shelter will attempt to re-home as many unowned cats as practicable. If a cat is deemed wild, uncontrollable or diseased the cat would not be considered suitable for re-homing and would be euthanased.

For further information visit:

**[www.dogandcatboard.com.au](http://www.dogandcatboard.com.au)**