



# Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about TNR



**What is TNR?** TNR (trap/neuter/return) is a humane, non-lethal alternative to trap-and-kill that effectively manages community cat populations. It's a comprehensive management plan in which homeless, free-roaming (a.k.a. community) cats are humanely trapped, evaluated and spayed or neutered by a licensed veterinarian, ear-tipped to show they've been sterilized, vaccinated against rabies and distemper, and then returned to their original habitat to live out their lives. Stopping the breeding is more effective than trap-and-kill methods at lowering the number of cats in the community.

**What are the benefits of TNR?** TNR saves taxpayer dollars by reducing the number of cats admitted to municipal shelters, which reduces their operating costs. TNR saves lives because fewer cats in shelters means fewer cats need to be killed, and fewer community cats in shelters increases adoption rates for friendly cats. In addition, TNR promotes public health by reducing the number of unvaccinated cats. Finally, sterilizing these cats reduces nuisance behaviors (i.e., spraying, fighting, howling and roaming) and related complaints.

**What happens if someone's pet cat is trapped?** All trapped cats are typically examined for identification. In most programs, unidentified animals are physically evaluated, sterilized, vaccinated, ear-tipped and returned to their territory, where they can easily be reunited with their families. Local ordinances may apply that clearly identify which cats are eligible for TNR. For example, the ordinance may specify that "Any cat roaming off its property and that isn't wearing visible identification is eligible for TNR."

**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 maximum number of a particular species 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 birth and survivability rates.

**What is the actual cost savings of TNR compared to the traditional trap-and-kill method of animal control?** Until a TNR program begins, it is difficult to calculate accurately how much money will be saved in a specific location. However, over time, through attrition and sterilization efforts, fewer cats will be breeding and contributing to the population growth. And fewer live animals to deal with inevitably means a decrease in the demand on taxpayer dollars. Over three years (2007-2010), the city of Jacksonville, Florida, saved approximately 13,000 lives and \$160,000, while feline nuisance complaints decreased.

**Are there any tools to help keep community cats out of designated areas?** Non-lethal deterrents for cats are effective and easily available. Some of these products are detailed on this video: [www.bestfriends.org/deter](http://www.bestfriends.org/deter).

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

It's important to consider instead what may happen 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?

**How serious of a threat are cats to bird populations?** TNR means fewer cats, which means fewer threats to birds. As noted on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "Threats to Native Birds" Web page ([birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/conservation/planning/threats](http://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 include chemical toxins and direct exploitation from hunting and capturing birds for pets.

**Does TNR encourage the abandonment of cats?** No. Cats will be abandoned with or without TNR. Unfortunately, cats have been abandoned for as long as people have had pet cats, which is why TNR is necessary today. Maintaining a local TNR colony is unlikely to be the determining factor behind whether someone abandons a pet or not.

**Do cats pose a risk to public health?** A human 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 a cat or having a cat at home. 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.

[felines.bestfriends.org](http://felines.bestfriends.org)