

## FACTSHEET

### Keeping your cat safe while renovating

Before starting your home improvement projects, make sure you have a plan to keep your cat safe during this time. Renovation chemicals, debris and noises can be detrimental to your cats' health and can often cause behavioural problems. Workers coming in and out of your home create a high risk of your cat escaping. Pets need to be kept away from work areas for their own safety and for the safety of the workers coming to your home.

**If you know your cat will not be able to handle the stress of your renovations, make alternative plans. Arrange to have your cat boarded at vet clinic or cattery. See whether a friend or family member can mind your cat or, if the renovations are going to take some time, it could be worth moving to pet-friendly rental accommodation for the duration of the renovations. Make sure your cat's microchip and registration details are up-to-date and consider a collar and ID tag as escape is a high risk during renovations or in a strange home. And take the opportunity to include some features your cat will enjoy – like stepped walkways, perches and secure cat enclosures!**

#### **Construction dust and debris**

Small particles of dust and debris from renovation work can easily attach to your cat's coat, their bedding and get into their lungs and eyes. This can cause difficulty breathing, asthma, eye irritations, skin allergies and/or toxicity if they ingest chemicals or foreign materials. Many older homes have lead paint and asbestos. These can be extremely dangerous for people and for pets. Asbestos removal is governed by regulation. Learn more at Asbestos Awareness (<https://asbestosawareness.com.au/>) and NSW Environment Protection Authority on Lead Safety (<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/household-building-and-renovation/lead-safety>)

Try to assign separate entrances for workers and family to help keep construction dust and dirt out of the areas you are still living in. This will also help prevent workers from accidentally leaving tools and supplies sitting around in non-work areas. If possible, choose an entrance for your workers closest to the construction zone to reduce foot traffic through your cat's space. For example, the workers might use the front door while your family uses the back or side door, or garage entrance.

#### **Paint and chemical fumes**

Cats are more sensitive to fumes than we are so do not assume that because you don't notice a smell that your cat is safe. Keep in mind a cat's lungs are much smaller than ours and their sense of smell is much better than ours.

Renovation work such as painting, floor finishing, using adhesives and varnishing are all potentially harmful to your cat. Make sure there is sufficient air flow to allow fresh air into areas where there may be heavy fumes not only for your cat's safety, but for the safety of yourself and workers. Keep your cat away from these areas in a separate room with ample

air flow for at least 1-2 days to allow time for fumes to dissipate. Even if your cat is mostly staying home during renovations, you should consider boarding them while particularly noisy or smelly/fume emitting jobs are being done.

Always check the type of paint or varnish being used to select one with minimum fumes and smell. Document all the products used (safety data is usually printed on the packaging; take photos to record all the different paints and chemicals that are being used for your renovations). If your cat somehow ingests something, the product information will help your vet to determine the best treatment for your cat.

### **Construction noises**

Cats are especially sensitive to noise and can become stressed during renovation time. Even the most confident cats want to have a safe, quiet space free from startling noise.

Find an area of your home as far as possible from the work zone where your cat can be. You might also consider playing classical music or cat music in their space while work is happening. If there are windows in your pet's room that workers or strangers will walk by during the day, consider keeping the window coverings closed to minimise stress.

### **Preventing escape**

Cats are masters of escape: they are fast, agile, and capable of climbing to make their escapes. Make it harder for this to happen by cat-proofing your home. This involves double and triple-checking fly screens and doors to make sure they cannot be opened easily by your cat. Choose a room for your cat to stay in that workers will not need to access. The room should be big enough to accommodate your cat's litter tray, food, and water sources as well as their favorite bedding and toys to make them comfortable. A cardboard box in the area is a great idea to give them a hiding spot if they get too stressed. A bedroom or office out of the way of foot traffic is ideal.

Hang signs on the doors for rooms your cat will be staying in, for example 'Do not open' or 'Keep closed: cat inside'. You might place furniture or a door stopper in front of the door to prevent workers from accidentally letting your cat out. Consider adding a cat run or cat-proof fencing during your renovations so your cat can still enjoy their home spaces without running away or for smaller spaces consider a portable crate that will keep your cat secure and help them to feel safe. For more information see our factsheet on [Cat-proof fencing and enclosures](#).

### **Stick with routines**

Cats are creatures of habit which is why it is especially important to maintain your cat's normal feeding and exercise routines as much as possible during a renovation. It will help them feel more in control of the situation and keep them comfortable and safe during this time. Do not switch brands of foods, change feeding times, or skip on playtime while renovating. If your cat is already stressed, sudden changes can lead to illness which may result in a vet trip which will further upset your cat. If your cat is not accustomed to being kept indoors for long durations, see our factsheet on [Indoor Cats](#) for tips.

Even confident cats are likely to be disturbed by renovations, but sensitive cats are sure to be stressed. Provide calming interventions such as 'Feliway', 'Zylkene' and calming treats to help them feel at ease.

Once renovations are over, thoroughly clean your home and remove potential hazards for your cat. If you have made big changes like adding or removing walls and rooms, gradually introduce your cat back into the entire home.

Things will look and smell different to them, so it is important to treat this time as if it is your cat's first time in a new home. Gradually introduce them to the renovated areas of the house, one room at a time, making sure your cat is fully settled and comfortable in one area before letting them explore the next. It is helpful also to place items of your cat's bedding or toys (anything with your cat's scent on it) into the new rooms as this will help to create a sense of familiarity for the cat. Best of luck!

*While all care has been taken in preparing this document, it is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as constituting professional advice. Mention of a product or business does not mean endorsement by Cat Protection.*