



Moving with your cat

People move with their cats every month of every year and WLCA often gets frantic messages about people not being able to find their cats in their old, or new, home (thinking they must have gotten outside while things were being moved out from the old home or in at the new one).

These scenarios are very understandable considering the disruption moving causes. If we think moving is stressful, our cats see it as cause for panic.

Cats are creatures of habit and like predictability, and stability, in their lives. If a routine is disrupted, or if someone new comes into the family, they often become out-of-sorts and may change their normal behaviour. Moving to a new home is high up on the scale of severe stress for cats, so it's best to plan ahead and make the transition as smooth and stress-free as possible for them, and for you.

At least a month prior to moving, ensure your cat has been spayed or neutered and has a tattoo or microchip in case the worst possible scenario happens - escape.

AT THE OLD HOME

Before you move, have the following ready:

- A solid cat carrier
- Cat food and litter
- Cat food bowls, litterbox, water dish
- Toys and bedding
- Masking tape
- Paper
- A bold marker

When you have almost packed the whole house, and BEFORE you have moved anything out, put your cat in a bedroom with everything on the list. Tape up a sign on the bedroom door that says "CAT INSIDE. DO NOT OPEN DOOR!" This will alert anyone who is helping you move, or movers, to the presence of the cat and will ensure no one lets the cat out accidentally. Items remaining in the room the cat is in can be moved out when they cat has gone to the new home.

Move the cat in with you when you will no longer be coming back to the old house.

Ensure the cat is in the cat carrier, place all the cat's items in a box and take them to the new location.

AT THE NEW HOME

Once at your new home, designate a bedroom to be the cat's room while you move items in. Place the same sign on the door of the bedroom at the new home. Unpack the cat's things and place them as similarly as possible to how they were in the bedroom of your old home. DO NOT take the cat out of the carrier if they don't exit on their own.

A cat's natural instinct in unknown territory is to hide until danger has passed. A cat will find the smallest, darkest, quietest space possible amidst the chaos of moving and you will have a very hard time finding them should they get out of their safe room. Ensure everyone knows not to let the cat out. You are in charge of the cat and will let them out when it's appropriate.

Once all items are moved into the home, close all doors to the outside and go visit with your cat to reassure them you're there and offer them a treat. Spend some time with them before heading back to the rest of the home to unpack.

If you have a very confident and relaxed cat, DO NOT let your cat out of the room until the large items are unpacked and located in their final spaces. Place the items for that bedroom in the room LAST so the cat has had time to be in the new room for at least 24-48 hours. If your cat is skittish and wary of new things and noises, keep the cat in the room for a week until everything is moved into place. Then, take the cat, in the carrier to other areas of the house so they can see how things look. Take the cat back to their room and open the door. Follow them around while they are exploring, keeping all doors to the outside, and windows, closed. Also close off the basement, if possible.

When the cat is exhibiting more confident behaviour (walking with tail lifted high, tall posture, friendly disposition, etc.), you can open up more spaces for them.

WHAT IF THEY GET OUT OF THE SAFE ROOM?

Most cats thought to be lost in moves are actually hiding either in the old home or in the new one. Cats that have hidden in the home they know and love are often in a basement, hiding from the noise and confusion. They may have also crawled into a piece of furniture and may be inadvertently transported to the new home, or could make their way out when the furniture is moved. This can be dangerous. One cat was stuck in a storage facility, with no food or water for 6 weeks, in the couch the family sent to storage. The cat was found alive, and made it, but was not in great shape. Other cats have been found loose in moving trucks or hiding in compartments on, or under, the truck or trying to get back into the home from outside after coming out of hiding days after the move.

Cats hiding in new locations are usually in impossible places like inside furniture, behind furnaces, in pipes or walls, under the toekicks of cabinets (where the cat in the photo of this article was found hiding), behind appliances or in boxes stored in dark areas. Most people will search for them to no avail and then contact us. We provide everyone with a "grid-search" strategy for finding their cat and most often, they are located within the home using this technique. Kittens are especially hard to find and need extreme care when moving.

Some cats do get outside, but the majority are hiding indoors. If they get out at the new location, they are usually hiding very close to the building under a structure.

You can avoid the trauma of added stress to a move, by following the steps outlined, so the cat can become acclimated to their new residence under the watchful eye of a designated family member.

The most important take-away point here is to confine the cat in both homes so you know where they are and can't escape, and to transport them in a carrier so they don't get loose outside at any point.