

13 Steps to Developing an Effective Pets-Welcome Policy

1. Limit the number of animals per dwelling. Any person, regardless of the size of his or her home, can maintain only a few pets responsibly. Because pets often are happier living in pairs, do not summarily restrict residents to only one pet per household. Establish reasonable limits based on the activity level of the pet and the care and exercise provided by the owner.

2. Allow only traditional pets in your rental home or housing community. Limit residents to having cats, dogs, rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, ferrets, mice, rats, small caged birds, and fish. Exotic or wild animals such as iguanas and hedgehogs don't belong in homes because they often cannot be kept responsibly.

3. Require that resident dogs, cats, rabbits, and ferrets be sterilized before they reach six months of age. Sterilized animals are much less likely to bite or spray urine. And they won't go through noisy heat cycles. Of course, sterilizing pets also helps reduce pet overpopulation—and prevents pets from breeding in your house, apartment building, or condominium. Require written proof of sterilization from a veterinarian, and keep it on file. (Most veterinarians routinely fulfill such requests for their clients.) Make exceptions for pets if they are certified by a veterinarian to be too old or sick to undergo spay or neuter surgeries.

4. Require that dogs be licensed and dogs and cats be up-to-date on rabies and other vaccinations. Dogs should be licensed with the county and vaccinated against rabies as required by law. Require written proof of licensure and vaccination status, and keep it on file. (Most veterinarians routinely fulfill such requests for their clients.)

5. Require that pets be kept under control at all times. Cats should be kept indoors or on a harness under direct human supervision while outdoors. Dogs should be on a leash and under human control while outdoors. If you lease a house or townhouse with a fenced-in yard, require that dogs not be left alone in the yard when the resident isn't home, and be sure to expressly prohibit chaining or otherwise tethering animals.

6. Require that cats and dogs wear collars with up-to-date identification at all times. In the event a resident's pet escapes and

becomes lost, this will make it easier to return the animal to his or her owner.

7. Require that residents with pets follow a written set of rules related to the responsible keeping of pets in your rental home or community.

These guidelines should include proper disposal of pets' waste, and, for larger housing communities, use of designated "pet-only" washers and dryers.

8. Do not require that cats be declawed or dogs be debarked.

Responsible pet caregivers solve issues such as destructive scratching and barking through humane behavior modification.

9. Evaluate prospective residents and their pets on an individual basis. Breed and size do not indicate a pet's temperament or suitability as a member of your housing community or as a resident in your rental home. For example, weight limits for dogs are usually only useful for units on upper floors of apartment buildings that lack carpeting or other means of effective soundproofing. This is because responsibly kept larger dogs will generally cause fewer problems for rental managers and for neighbors than irresponsibly kept smaller dogs.

So be sure to evaluate each animal on his or her own merits. When possible, check with previous landlords or apartment managers to find out whether the applicants or their pets caused any problems. Interview prospective residents to determine their commitment to providing responsible pet care.

10. Require that prospective residents fill out a pet application form. If you decide to welcome pet caregivers into your rental home or housing community, require that they fill out a pet application form and supply you with a photo of their pet(s).

11. Require that approved pet owners sign a pet addendum to your regular rental agreement. This addendum should state that the resident understands all stated pet-keeping policies, such as those mentioned in Step 7. It should also outline the steps that will be taken in the event a pet-related dispute occurs—such as requiring the use of a local mediator. See a sample pet addendum to a rental agreement.

12. Require a reasonable supplemental security deposit. If allowed by state and local law, require pet caregivers to remit an additional refundable

security deposit specifically to cover any damage caused by pets. This additional deposit serves as further incentive to keep animals responsibly.

13. Require that current residents who do not currently have pets inform you if they intend to acquire a pet. State in the lease that residents must get your approval to bring a pet into your housing community *before* they adopt a pet.

Information from The Humane Society of the United States.