

# **Hard Hat Cats® Summary Operating Instructions**

## **Summary:**

This guide is an overview for property-owners considering hiring working cats, as well as for cat rescuers who want to find employment opportunities for working cats.

These instructions summarize bringing in, setting up, and maintaining working cats as part of your staff.

Their job is non-toxic pest-control. Your responsibility is to provide food, water, shelter, healthcare, and the occasional “Atta Cat!”.

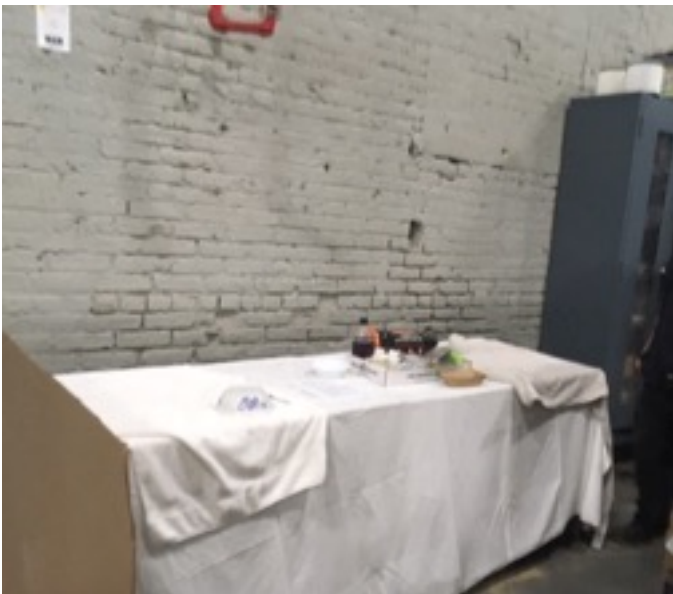
## **PHASE 1 - Choosing the Right Cats:**

Hard Hat Cats™ places working cats from the NYC Animal Care Center (ACC), the city shelter. We work with the potential employer to determine:

- number of cats
- type and size of facility
- cat personalities best suited to that particular facility
- cat adoption and transport to facility
- crate placement. Hard Hat Cats™ supplies the crate(s) below.

## **PHASE 2 - Set-up at Your Facility:**

Cats are placed in a crate with a sheet over it to make a “safe space” where they can acclimate to the smells and sounds of a new place and the people who feed them and scoop their litter box. Crate Size: 42” L x 28” W x 30” H.



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Two crates can be cable-tied together for 3-4 cats. See inside and outside views above for a three-cat set-up ( 2 crates cable-tied together).

Crates contain a cat-carrier as an extra cubby hole, cat beds, extra pads and blankets, food bowl, litter box. For water, add 5 tablespoons to one 5.5 oz can of food, rather than place a water bowl in the crate. They may kick it over. See Food section.

Cable-tie the cat-carrier door (at the back) to the side of the crate to keep it open.

Timing: Cats stay 2-3 weeks in the crates. After about a week, start pulling back the sheet about 18” so the cats can see out, yet still have a hiding place. Repeat, gradually pulling it further. You can *always* backtrack to prior step if cats respond fearfully.

**Primary Importance:** Keep crate doors closed and locked when not in use to ensure cats do not escape. This is unknown turf. They may panic and escape when you open your own facility doors. Cats survive by knowing their territory. This gradual process acclimates them to you and your facility as their new, safe turf.

### **Human Interactions - TIPS:**

- *Feral cats do not seek human interaction. They avoid it, run the other way.*
- *Feral cats are not aggressive towards humans unless cornered / attacked by humans.*
- *Do not approach or seek contact with the cats while they are in crates.*
- *Don't whip back the sheet to show visitors your feral cats.*
- *When feeding and scooping / changing litter, body-block the door.*
- *Develop a “call”, whistle, or noise when you feed them so they associate it w/ food.*
- *Some good rules of thumb:*

*Do not make direct eye contact (sign of aggression)*

*Do not lower hand over head (sign of aggression)*

*Do not bare your teeth (sign of aggression)*

*Feign indifference. Glance sideways to observe.*

*Close eyes slowly, a sign of trust, an “eye kiss”.*

*You're on their clock now. They'll observe you and decide how close they want to get and when, if ever.* 🕒

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### PHASE 3 - Release Nightly to Get “Lay of the Land”:

Once cats seem comfortable with the sheet pulled back, one evening (or shift) after workers have left, give them a very light (or no) dinner, then:

- Open crate door, cable-tie or prop it open so they can go in and out freely.
- Turn off lights, except for a small light somewhere.
- Allow them to wander, check out your facility space on their own.
- Place small amounts of food (1 tablespoon) in a few places to get them to explore.
- Be careful opening outside doors when you come in the next day.
- Chances are they will run back into the crate when they hear people, but play it safe.
- If they do NOT automatically run back inside the crate, “call” them for breakfast.
- They should run in to eat. Close door again.
- If they do *not* return, IGNORE them. Do NOT search or try to herd them home!
- They are hiding somewhere safe and observing. They’ll show up when they’re ready.
- But **be aware** of leaving wide facility doors open! The cats could bolt.
- Recommend getting pet (child) gates to block open facility (e.g., delivery) doors:
- <https://www.petmate.com/precision-pet-ultimate-exercise-pen/product/PP49>.
- Look on second-hand sites for these. They come 3’ or 4’ high.
- Leave the crate door open and carry on routine below.
- Repeat evening release routine for about 3-5 days (as necessary; more of a gut feel ).
- Next step is keeping the crate door open, night and day.
- Are the cats freaking out? Go back a step, e.g., closing door, covering with the sheet.

The crates remain until they are no longer needed. This is usually after about 3-4 weeks depending on cats’ progress and your own preferences.

There is no pressure or strict time schedule. Cats differ. We play this by ear.

During this period, it is a good practice to stay in touch with the cat rescuer to discuss cats’ progress, questions, problems, and to better determine when to progress to the next phase, or whether it would be better to backtrack a step.

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### PHASE 4 - Ongoing

Once cats are comfortable and in command of *their* turf (aka *your* facility), your responsibility is to provide ongoing food, water, litter box, shelter, and healthcare (only if necessary due to accident or illness).

For shelters we recommend the black rectangular Fishbox shelter (about \$30), made of styrofoam, contains straw, and can hold 3 cats comfortably. It's a warm escape-hatch where cats can sleep and avoid people. It provides adequate heat on winter nights.



#### Fishbox Shelter Dimensions:

Large: 15"W x 18"H x 3 "L  
Small 11"W x 13"H x 33"L

For facilities subject to **Agency Inspections**, fish or meat boxes or coolers, painted black, blend into the scenery.

Plywood, work tools, plants, etc. can be placed atop.

See shelter options on this site, including DIY self-builds: <https://www.neighborhoodcats.org/tnr-in-nyc/nyc-winter-shelters>

Example left shows cat beds on top of a fishbox shelter and a cat carrier (far left) with door open to serve as a separate.

Note the large blue litter box (lower right). An enclosed "domed" box contains smells and litter better.

Food and water bowls are nearby. See **Food** and **Litter** sections below.

Recommended: a scratch pad(s) or post if there are soft furnishings you want to protect.

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### **HEALTH:**

Complete medical records are provided for cats from the New York City Animal Shelter, ACC (Animal Care Center):

- Females are spayed; males are neutered.
- Cats are vaccinated for rabies and FVRCP (combo vaccine against cat diseases).
- These vaccines should provide adequate protection for life, especially for cats who stay indoors. We do not recommend vet visits for booster shots.
- Treated for parasites (fleas and worms) - automatic protocol at ACC.
- Cats are microchipped.
- Adoptions are final when you decide to keep the cats, at which point ownership is transferred from the rescuer's name to yours on the microchip.
- Alternately, you may adopt /pick up the cats directly, if arranged in advance with ACC and the cat rescuer, in which case the microchip information will be in your name.
- Cats sometimes leave the city shelter with a cold or mild respiratory infection (URI). The shelter provides an antibiotic which should be continued and added to food.
- Being out of the shelter in a stable environment is the best remedy and cats throw off the cold quickly. But it is best to be aware of this phenomenon.

### **Litter Box and Litter:**

Once cats are out of the crate, a "domed" enclosed litter box does a better job of containing odors and litter than an open litter tray.

Many cats spray litter when covering their urine/ feces. Think "surf at Malibu".

One box for 2-3 cats should suffice. Many rescuers recommend one box per cat.

In my experience, one box works fine for multiple cats if you *keep the box clean*.

### **Types of litter:**

- Recommend any "clumping" litter to more easily scoop out and dispose of urine "clumps" and feces. Grocery store brands fine, as long as "Clumping".
- Non-clumping litter retains the urine and smell until all the litter is changed out.
- World's Best Litter is flushable, but only practical if litter box is in the bathroom.
- Beware of strong-smelling brands, e.g., evergreen-based litter. Some cats will avoid it.

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### **Keep the Box Clean:**

Nobody wants to deal with cats who “go outside of the box”, so keep it clean.

Scoop litter at least once per day. Better, twice, when you feed.

Cat's are fastidious. If the box is dirty, they won't use it!

Once per week, empty out used litter, wash the box with plain soap and water (no bleach!), and refill with clean litter.

### **Food and Water Recommendations:**

- Good nutrition and plenty of water is the best way keep the cats out of the vet's office.
- Cats are obligate carnivores, not grain eaters. They cannot convert grain to protein.
- Feed canned food twice daily.
- E.g., For 2 cats, split one 5.5 oz can twice daily.
- Ingredients are more important than name-brand or cost. Read the labels!
- Meat/fish are 1st rung ingredients; animal by-products are 2nd rung; grains come last and provide extra calories.
- Some inexpensive, but nutritious, grocery store brands are: “Friskies Shreds w/ Beef in Gravy” and “Fancy Feast Fish with Shrimp” (high protein content). Some expensive name-brands have lower-quality ingredients. Repeat: Read the labels!
- Provide a clean bowl of fresh water daily.
- Add 2 tablespoons of water per 5.5 oz can of food to keep kidneys healthier longer.
- NOTE: When cats are confined in the crate, add 5 tablespoons of water per can, since water bowls get kicked over in a crowded crate, and the cats *need* water.
- If supplemental dry food is required, however, these are suitable choices:
  - <https://www.chewy.com/taste-wild-rocky-mountain-grain-free/dp/181327>
  - <https://www.chewy.com/american-journey-all-life-stages/dp/158630>
  - <https://www.chewy.com/earthborn-holistic-primitive-feline/dp/36427>
- Give each cat about 4 tablespoons of high-quality dry food per day.
- AVOID grocery store dry food. It's meat-flavored corn. Cats get addicted and won't eat the more nutritious canned food.