

For Immediate Release:

December 1, 2008

Contact:ELIZABETH PAROWSKI, eparowski@alleycat.org or (240) 482-1984PATRICIA JONES, patricia@pjonesinc.com or (718) 651-7187**ALLEY CAT ALLIES OFFERS WINTER SAFETY TIPS FOR FERAL AND STRAY CATS****Build plans for inexpensive shelters and feeding stations available on web site**

BETHESDA – Alley Cat Allies, the national advocate for feral and stray cats, today issued its annual list of easy and inexpensive tips to help feral cats this winter.

Feral cats spend their whole lives outdoors, and can be found all over the country, from the largest cities to the most rural landscapes. They are not socialized to humans and can't be adopted into homes. Feral cats live amongst their own in family groups called "colonies," and studies show they are just as healthy as pet cats.

"We know that millions of people already help to care for the cats in their communities each day," said Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies. "While most feral cats are skilled at finding their own food and a place to sleep, providing specially-built shelters and dedicated feeding sites guarantee the cats a warm spot to escape the harsh winter weather and deter them from places they are not wanted."

To help the feral and stray cats in your community this winter, Alley Cat Allies suggests the following simple steps:

Build an outdoor shelter and a feeding station.

Shelters are easy and inexpensive to build. You can use the plans available at www.alleycat.org, or modify a pre-built dog house. Some manufacturers also sell pre-built cat shelters.

The shelter should be elevated off the ground and sited in a quiet, unobtrusive area with a minimal amount of traffic. A good-sized shelter offers a space just big enough for three to five cats to huddle. The door should be no more than six to eight inches wide to keep out wildlife and larger predators. Install a flap on the door to keep out snow and wind.

In addition to a shelter, you can build a simple feeding station with a roof and sides to protect cats from the elements while they eat.

Insulate the shelter against moisture as well as cold.

Straw resists the wet and keeps a shelter warm, and is the best choice for insulation and bedding. Blankets are not a good idea, as they absorb moisture like a sponge.

Keep food and drinking water from freezing.

Wet food in insulated containers is most ideal for winter time feeding, as it takes less energy for cats to digest than dry food – and cats can use all that extra energy to keep warm.

Preventing liquids from freezing can be a challenge during the winter and can lead to a risk for dehydration. Keep water drinkable by using bowls that are deep rather than wide, and place them in a sunny spot. If possible, refill the bowls with hot or warm water. A pinch of

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sugar in the water also keeps it from freezing as quickly, and provides an added boost of energy for the cats. An alternative are the heated electric bowls found in many pet shops.

Try to keep to a regular feeding schedule every day. The cats will come to expect you, and the food and water will spend less time in the cold before it is consumed.

Get educated about cats, and stop the breeding cycle with Trap-Neuter-Return.

Make sure to educate yourself, your family, and your neighbors about the habits of outdoor cats during the winter time. For example, check under the car before starting the engine, as cats will sometimes crawl into car engines or hide under them for warmth.

Prevent another “kitten season” next year by getting the outdoor cats in your neighborhood neutered now. While spring is the time of year when most litters are born, cats have a 63-day gestation period and usually mate in winter. End the cycle of breeding and help the cats lead better lives by humanely trapping them and having them neutered by a veterinarian. A local volunteer group practicing Trap-Neuter-Return may be able to help. Visit Alley Cat Allies’ web site, www.alleycat.org, for more information about starting a Trap-Neuter-Return program in your community.

More information about winter safety for outdoor cats can be found at www.alleycat.org.

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About Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies is dedicated to ending the killing of cats and leading the movement for their humane care. Their web site is www.alleycat.org

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