

**Fill Vacancies, Reduce Turnover and Increase Profits (A Property Owner's Guide: All About Pets)
by the San Francisco SPCA**

Do you want to

**Enhance profitability?
Lower your vacancy rates?
Reduce turnover?
Broaden your pool of prospective tenants?
Promote a sense of tenant safety and security?
Rent to happy and satisfied tenants?**

..... then open your doors to responsible pet guardians!

Landlords Say "Yes" to Pets!

"The words 'pets okay' sure bring in calls," says San Francisco property owner Eleanor Sampson. "You get a different type of people when you advertise that you take pets." "I think pet guardians are more stable tenants," Sampson continues.

But Sampson is a selective landlord. She screens her potential tenants, human and animal, to assure herself that the pet in question is well cared for. This may mean asking to see the animal in its current environment, to see if it is well cared for and has acclimated well to apartment life.

"I think it takes a responsible person to properly care for a pet, and I think that responsibility extends to their taking care of the property," says landlord Robb Simpson. He feels pet owners might actually make better tenants. Simpson also finds that he has no problem with tenants who have pets if the ground rules are laid out in advance. "I've had pets here since I bought the building," he says, "and I've never had any problems."

"I've never had problems with people who are pet guardians," says property owner June Becker, "but I've had problems with people who don't have pets!" Becker always calls a potential tenant's previous landlord to be sure there haven't been any problems in the past. She also looks at how the animal has been groomed because she feels how the animal is cared for physically can be a gauge for the potential tenant's responsibility.

Becker says she doesn't find it necessary to charge a pet deposit, and that there aren't any problems as long as a few basic ground rules, such as "Pick up after your dog," are established from the start.

Pets in Rental Housing: Myths and Realities

Myth: "If I let one tenant have a pet, I'll have to let everyone have one."

Reality: Many landlords fear that if they allow pets they will be overrun with irresponsible pet guardians and the problems they create. But with a few simple procedures and precautions in place, landlords can successfully screen out these people without penalizing responsible pet guardians who will make excellent tenants.

Myth: "One might be okay, but more than one is just too many."

Reality: In some cases, a second pet may actually make life easier all around. Most companion animals, including dogs and cats, are social beings and companionship is one of their highest priorities. For a pet that spends a lot of time alone, a playmate will help alleviate boredom. And the playmates need not be of the same species: many dogs and cats, for instance, can become the best of friends when raised together or properly introduced.

Myth: "Dogs need big back yards and someone to be home with them all day."

Reality: Dogs do need regular exercise and a chance to spend time with their human caretakers. But when these requirements are met, dogs can be happy in the city or in the country.

Myth: “Small dogs are o.k., but big dogs just aren’t suited to apartment life.”

Reality: It’s not a dog’s size which determines how well it will do in rental housing; it’s a dog’s energy level and exercise requirements that are important. Many large dogs tend to be more laid-back and easy-going than their tiny counterparts. More active breeds may require a greater commitment from their guardians to ensure these animals get the exercise they need. Other factors, such as age and temperament, can also be important. Older dogs - even large ones - for instance, are generally less active than puppies.

Successful Pet Policies: A Guideline for Property Owners

The following are some general guidelines for property owners to consider when setting up a pet policy. These are not hard and fast rules, and policies for individual properties should be designed to best meet your specific needs.

- Start with screening: Careful screening of prospective tenants is the first step to a successful pet policy. By asking a few simple questions, property owners can screen out irresponsible pet guardians and find the responsible ones who will make good tenants.
- Put it in writing: A written agreement protects the interests of both the property owner and tenant, and pet rules and procedures help avoid misunderstanding.
- Charge reasonable pet deposits: What is reasonable may vary, depending on the nature of each rental. While many landlords don’t charge any additional pet deposit, one recent survey showed that the most common pet deposit was \$150.00.
- Establish limits: Limit permissible animals to common pets like dogs, cats, rodents, fish, and birds. A policy on how many pets each tenant may own can also help keep the building’s pet population at manageable levels.
- Set parameters: Should certain types of pets be confined to tenant’s apartments? Should other pets be permitted in all or only parts of the common areas? Should dogs be leashed when in hallways and other communal areas? Establish pet regulations in advance, before any conflicts arise.
- Ensure cleanliness: A responsible pet guardian will agree to immediately pick up and dispose of dog feces, bag kitty litter before placing it in the garbage containers, and take other necessary sanitation measures.
- Require spaying and neutering: Spayed and neutered animals are generally healthier, better behaved, and more suited to apartment living than their unaltered counterparts.
- Determine emergency arrangements: Property owners may want to keep a file with the names and addresses of each pet’s veterinarian and substitute caretakers designated by the tenant.
- Put disciplinary procedures in writing and enforce them fairly: These procedures might include a provision for warning(s) before any punitive measures are taken. Whatever the policy, fair and consistent enforcement will reduce disputes and make for better relations between management and tenants.
- Tell tenants about available services: Pet owners in San Francisco are lucky to have plenty of pet-related services at their disposal. Dozens of dog walkers and pet sitters are available in the City, and The San Francisco SPCA offers dog training classes, cat behavior videos, low-cost spay neuter clinic, an animal behavior advice hotline, and more.

Responsible Pet Guardians – A Checklist for Landlords

The following is a list of questions for property owners to use when interviewing prospective tenants with pets. These questions are intended as a starting point to help property owners get to know a tenant and his or her commitment to providing responsible pet care. In addition to discussing these questions, we recommend that property owners ask prospective tenants to bring their pets, especially dogs, to the interview: a well-groomed, well-behaved pet is one of the best signs of a responsible pet guardian.

For all pet guardians:

- What type of pet(s) do you have?
- How long have you had them?
- Do you have a letter or other documentation from your veterinarian stating that each pet is in good health and is up-to-date on all his/her vaccinations?
- Have there been any complaints about your pet at your current address? How did you resolve them?
- Did your pet(s) cause any damage at your current address? If so, did you pay your landlord for all the damage done?
- May I contact your current landlord to discuss your pet further?
- May I visit you and your pet(s) at your current address to see how they are getting along?
- Would you object to my checking in on the pet after you move in?
- Who will care for your pet(s) when you go away on vacation or business?
- Are you a member of The San Francisco SPCA or other humane organization?

For cat guardians:

- Has your cat been spayed or neutered?
- Does your cat use the litter box you provide?
- Do you keep your cat inside?
- Does your cat have any medical or behavioral problems? If so, what treatment/training is he or she receiving?
- How does your cat get along with other animals and people?

For dog guardians:

- Has your dog been spayed or neutered?
- Is your dog housebroken?
- Have you and your dog completed a dog obedience class?
- How and how often do you exercise your dog?
- Do you keep your dog on leash when you go for walks?
- Do you make a point of cleaning up after your dog?
- How much time does your dog spend alone each day?
- Does your dog stay inside when it is alone?
- Is your dog inside during the night?
- Does your dog have any medical or behavioral problems? If so, what treatment/training is it receiving?
- How does your dog get along with other animals and people?

With careful screening following these guidelines, you may find that your property stays rented and profitable during this time of shrinking rents and competition for tenants.

This article is general in nature, and not intended for advice in a specific situation. Consult with your attorney, and your local SPCA for additional information. You can visit the San Francisco SPCA website at www.sfspca.org.