

THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF CAT LITTER

There are many different types of litters to choose from - so many in fact, that it gets rather stressful sometimes! What does my cat need in a litter? What do I need? Well, I know wild cats look for sandy soil, which allows them to dig, and they prefer to keep their business hidden. So, I need litter that my cat can easily dig in. Also, wild cats do not return to the same restroom spot to avoid predators, so it must be easy for me to keep clean (it's always a good idea to clean the litter box daily!). However, my biggest concern is my cat's health. I want to make sure my kitty is not being exposed to anything dangerous when using the litter box. So, what litter is available that won't negatively affect my cat's health, while also addressing my cat's needs, my needs, and is also good for the planet?

Let's start by looking at the most common litter types, and why many of them are actually a health and environmental hazard!

THE DANGERS OF CLAY LITTER

Clay litter is the number one most recognized type of litter among cat owners. It's great for odor control, relatively easy to scoop, and many cats have no problem with learning to dig in clay litter. However, there are several problems with clay litter!

First, there's the huge amount of dust. Some cats can inhale enough dust that it can cause lung issues, and possible death. The dust contains a hidden chemical that makes it even more toxic, and brings me to the second problem with clay litter: sodium bentonite. This is what causes the clumping action in clay litter, and it's especially dangerous when ingested...which all cats will do when they lick their paws after using the litter box. Clay litter can cause intestinal blockages which can lead to death, and the sodium bentonite is also a known health hazard for people.

The third problem with clay litter is that it's environmentally destructive in addition to being a health hazard! Clay litter is strip mined from otherwise pristine natural environments, killing native wildlife, ruining their habitat, and dumping tons and tons of silt into rivers and the ocean, where it chokes aquatic life and further destroys the ecosystem. Not good! To make matters worse, and the fourth problem with clay litter, is that all of that used litter ends up in a landfill. Hundreds of thousands of tons of clay litter end up in a landfill each year!

The bottom line is that, although clay litter is cheap, that's about the only benefit it offers. It's harmful for your cat, it's harmful for you, and it's harmful for the planet. Avoid it at all costs!

THE DANGERS OF CRYSTAL LITTER

Crystal litter is made from the same type of crystals that you find in the little silica packets. This is great for absorbing liquids, but is also very dangerous if accidentally eaten, and can cause death if ingested. The crystals are also very painful on paws and difficult for your kitty to dig in, which is why some cats stop using the litter box after you switch to crystal litter.

My main concern is the safety of crystal litter. Using crystal litter can lead to your cat developing silicosis from the inhalation of microscopic silica dust. Even worse, most crystal litter is dyed blue with a chemical called cobalt chloride. This dye helps indicate the moisture level in the litter, but this

dye is known to cause cancer in both your kitty and you: it has carcinogenic characteristics and is very bad for your kitty, you and your family, and the environment in general.

Just like with clay litter, the mining of silica for crystal litter is environmentally destructive. Silica is often strip-mined or excavated directly from beaches. Also, like clay litter, it ends up in landfills and is non-biodegradable. Simply put, crystal litter is also bad for your kitty, you, and the environment!

THE DANGERS OF PAPER LITTER

This litter type is a rather “new” litter on the market and is made from recycled newspaper. This is a good idea in theory because it's being recycled, and it's easy for cats to dig in. But that's where the benefits end, because just like with clay litter, a dangerous clumping compound is added to paper litter. You guessed it: sodium bentonite, a compound that is known to be a health hazard to people and kitties. Without this clumping agent, paper litter wouldn't clump! Paper litter also isn't very absorbent, doesn't control odors very well, and ultimately, ends up in a landfill right alongside clay litter, making it not a good alternative to clay and crystal litter.

PLANT-BASED LITTERS – THE HEALTHY AND SAFE ALTERNATIVE

In response to kitty owners like me wanting a safe, earth-friendly choice, several plant-based litters have recently been invented that work very well. Plant-based litter can be made from corn, wheat, or soy. The benefits of using these litters are that no clumping agent is needed and dust is kept to a minimum, or completely non-existent. Many of these litters are flushable as well.