

How to Create a Pets in the Workplace Policy



Why do you need a Pets in the Workplace Policy?

Allowing employees to bring their pets to work can be a shot in the arm for recruitment, retention and morale. But it can also be a recipe for disaster. Companies considering such policies must carefully weigh the pros and cons. That means considering the needs of not only pet owners but others at the workplace whose health, safety, comfort and productivity might be affected by the presence of pets at the site. Here's how to create a pets in the workplace policy that strikes an appropriate balance among all of these considerations.

The Pros & Cons of Allowing Pets

Accepting pets is a potentially powerful amenity that can give you a decisive edge in attracting and retaining employees, especially in the current economy where many are so reluctant to leave their homes and come to the office each day. In addition, studies show that employees who bring their dogs to work are significantly less stressed and more productive than those who have to leave their dogs at home. Helping employees save money on sitters' and walkers' fees can also go a long way.

But there are also disadvantages to allowing pets. For one thing, it may violate building, health or other codes, e.g., if you're a restaurant, grocery store or other establishment that sells food and beverages. In addition, letting employees bring pets to work may create major problems with other employees, such as those with dog allergies or phobias.

Establish 12 Pet Rules

You can't accept pets if it would violate the law; and you probably shouldn't accept pets if it would cause significant hardship to others in the building. But the other disadvantages of having animals on the property—health, liability, safety, nuisance, etc.—aren't necessarily deal breakers to the extent they can be effectively controlled via a fair, sensible and reasonable policy.

- **1. Exempt Bona Fide Service Animals**

To start, specify that the pet policy doesn't apply to assistance and service animals employees may require to deal directly with a disability-related need. Such animals don't count as pets and you must accommodate them under human rights laws to the point of undue hardship.

- **2. Require Prior Approval of Each Pet**

Providing blanket permission for employee pets is a recipe for chaos. You need to maintain tight control by requiring employees to get prior written permission for each pet they propose to bring to the workplace. Specifically, there should be a pets permission process. You might even want to charge employees a fee for processing pet permission requests

- **3. Limit Number of Permissible Pets**

Establish criteria for acceptance, starting with the number of pets permitted at any particular time. You might also want to impose size and weight limits.

- **4. Ban Wild and Exotic Animals**

Don't let your workplace become a zoo or menagerie for wild and exotic animals. Exclude birds, snakes and other reptiles, chinchillas, ferrets, iguanas, monkeys, pot-bellied pigs, rabbits, raccoons, rodents, weasels, skunks, tarantulas, scorpions, spiders and basically any other undomesticated animal other than a dog or cat.

- **5. Ban Dangerous Dog Breeds**

While dogs may be man's best friend, certain breeds pose risks of violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour, and may even be banned under local laws for your type of property. Breeds you should consider banning include Pit Bulls (aka American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, or American Pit Bull Terriers), Bull Terriers, Bull Mastiffs, German Shepherds, Huskies, Malamutes, Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers, Chow Chows and Rhodesian Ridgebacks.

- **6. Require Evidence of Good Behaviour**

Require employees that apply for permission to keep a pet to provide evidence that the animal is:

- Properly vaccinated against all diseases and conditions that can threaten

- human health;
- Potty-trained;
- Spayed or neutered; and
- Not violent, aggressive, unduly noisy or smelly and generally well-behaved.

- **7. Require Employees to Register Accepted Pets**

Specify that any and all accepted pets must be properly registered. Keep records listing the name, species, breed and location of each pet you accept, along with a photograph and records of current vaccinations.

- **8. Reserve Right to Charge Pet Deposits**

Specify that employees are responsible for any and all damage done by their pets. You might also want to require employees to pay a refundable deposit to defray the costs of pet damage.

- **9. Require Employees to Ensure Pet Obeys House Rules**

It's critically important for employees to accept responsibility for their pets' behaviour. Among other things, pets should be kept on a leash at all times, have appropriate identification and not engage in excessive barking or other conduct that might create a nuisance or disturb others. Employees should also agree not to let their pets relieve themselves except in specifically designated areas, clean up after their pets and immediately and properly dispose of droppings.

- **10. Establish Pet-Free Areas**

You need to designate certain elevators and common areas no-pet zones where individuals with allergies, phobias or dislikes of animals can find refuge. Require employees to be aware of and keep their pets out of these no-pet zones.

- **11. Reserve Right to Revoke Permission to Keep Pets**

Make it clear that house rules will be strictly enforced and that violations are grounds for revoking permission to keep a particular pet. In addition, reserve the right to revoke all permissions at any time and for any reason if you determine that your pet-friendly policy isn't working and you want to go back to banning pets from the workplace.

- **12. Require Employees to Indemnify You Against Liability**

Lawyers say that you shouldn't let employees keep pets unless and until they accept strict liability for any resulting bodily injury and property damage their pets may inflict, along with a certificate of insurance demonstrating adequate coverage under their general liability policy. In addition, get employees to indemnify you for all attorneys' fees, litigation costs and other losses and expenses you incur as a result of their pets.