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Boston officials crackdown on 'professional' cat, bird feeders

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 16, 2013 01:39 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

City officials in Boston say they are trying to combat health- and sanitation-related problems created by a growing number of people who leave food outside to feed stray cats and birds.

“Professional feeders,” as city officials call them, violate local health and sanitation laws if they leave any food on someone else’s property or large amounts of food outside for an extended period of time on their own property.

Food left outside attracts unwanted pests and rodents, and congregating animals drawn to the backyard buffets can become a nuisance, leaving behind droppings and other messes that create sanitary code violations, according to Lisa Timberlake, spokeswoman for Boston’s Inspectional Services Department.

Until recently, the department rarely received complaints about animal feeder, she said. But over the past six months, the city has fielded between 20 and 30 calls, mainly about people feeding cats and birds.

Documents provided by city officials show there are at least 23 addresses known to be cat-feeding grounds and another 15 locales are identified as bird-feeding hot spots.

Those addresses, most of which city officials found after neighbors’ complaints, are spread across the city, including locations in: Allston, Brighton, Dorchester, East Boston, Mission Hill, Roxbury, Roslindale and South Boston.

“We are now working with animal control, animal rescue leagues and the feeders to control,” the situation, Timberlake said.

City officials in recent months have issued several fines, ranging up to \$250, for unsanitary conditions and illegal dumping related to animal feeding.

Feeding stray animals is not illegal, as long as the feeding does not create unsanitary conditions or other nuisances, officials said.

City officials said they are working to educate feeders to only leave enough food out to ensure it can be eaten in one sitting and to promptly remove leftover food and whatever container or dish the food may have been placed in.

Improper feeding methods have resulted in dozens of cats congregating in certain

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neighborhoods as they wait to be fed. Some nonprofit animal care organizations are working to rescue, spay and neuter and find adoptive families for some of those cats, which also helps control neighborhood cat colonies.

In May, city officials issued an illegal dumping fine to an East Boston woman for leaving cat food out for an extended period of time at three different neighborhood locations: near 282 Marginal St, outside the Jeffries Yacht Club and near the Samuel Adams Elementary School.

The woman appealed and the president of a local animal care agency wrote a letter asking city officials not to fine the woman, but to issue a warning instead. The letter said the woman was working as a volunteer for the organization to care for colonies of "community cats," which the organization has spayed and neutered, vaccinated and treated for parasites.

The organization promised city officials that it has, and will continue to, remind its cat caretaking volunteers, who are located in "many North Shore communities," not to leave behind any food or trash when feeding cats.

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