

# DOUBLE-COMPARTMENT (AKA DOUBLE-SIDED) HOUSING AND WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL FOR HOUSING CATS AND DOGS IN ANIMAL SHELTERS, CLINICS, AND HOSPITALS

Housing plays a key role in animal health. For pet animals, the housing we use in our animal shelters, clinics, boarding facilities and hospitals can promote their well-being and reduce stress if it meets the animal's basic housing needs. When housing is poor – well it sucks not only for the animals but also for all the folks caring for them and the public too.



Double-compartment housing promotes animal well-being, allows animals an opportunity to show their best selves and is easy for staff to maintain.

Double compartment housing is simply housing that has two separate housing areas connected by a door, pass-through or portal that provides adequate space for the animal and allows 24/7 access to both sides of the housing. One side serves as the main living area with bed, food and water and the other provides a bathroom space. Generally during cleaning the animal remains in the housing unit on one side while the other side is tidied or cleaned. When animals continue to use the same housing space (recommended) little to no cleaning is needed. For healthy animals simply tidy up the bed, wipe away any smudges on the walls with soap and water, change the litter box or remove any pee or poop from the kennel floor and clean those areas up, and move on. Only when a cage or kennel is going to be occupied by a different animal do we need to do a deep clean with disinfection. ss

Low-cost retrofit of two stainless steel cages into double-compartment by adding portal, giving more adequate space



**KORET  
SHELTER  
MEDICINE  
PROGRAM**

Dr. Denae Wagner, DVM, MPVM

Assistant Director

UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program

[dcwagner@ucdavis.edu](mailto:dcwagner@ucdavis.edu)



Candace Harrison, AIA

Shelter Architect

Indigo | Hammond + Playle Architects LLP

[harrison@indigoarch.com](mailto:harrison@indigoarch.com)

## Double-compartment housing helps to meet basic shelter animal housing needs:

1. Meets an animal's desire to defecate and urinate away from where they eat and sleep
  - a. Double compartment housing promotes potty training in juveniles and adults, allowing them to express their natural behavior to eliminate away from their bed areas.
2. Helps to provide adequate housing space
3. Minimizes the need for handling during routine daily care of cleaning and feeding
  - a. This minimizes animal stress
  - b. Reduces disease and disease transmission risks
  - c. Helps to insure staff safety and efficiency of care



Separation of food/water and litter area makes for happier & healthier cats

### Dogs' and cats' natural behavior is to eliminate away from where they sleep and eat.

The two compartments meet this need by providing animals with an area for their bed, food and water and a separate area for elimination. Double compartment housing also tends to more adequately provide animals with room to move around - "adequate space". It's difficult to say exactly where the cut-off is for housing space size, but too little is often the norm when animals are housed in single compartment housing.

- For cats, we recommend 8 ft<sup>2</sup> or greater of cage floor space (shelving space does not count). This turns out to be at minimum a cage about 4' long by 24-28" deep divided into a living area and a bathroom area. Most older cage housing is retrofittable using a [portal](#) between two 2' x 2' cages. A bigger size cage - 5' long (two 30" long by 28" deep units with a pass-through/portal) works very well and is often recommended for cage housing if building new.
- For dog housing the size needed is variable because the range in dog sizes, but some common kennel dimensions are 4-5' wide by 10-12' long for med-large dogs and 6' wide by 10-12' long for giant breeds, each being divided in the middle by a transfer door (otherwise known as a guillotine door).

### No matter the size, cages and kennels are housing that imposes restrictions on a pets' movement and natural behaviors.

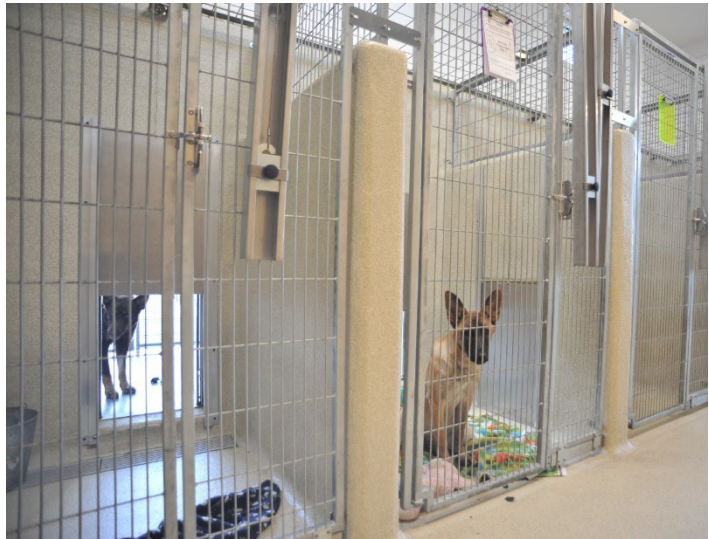
Our research has shown significant behavioral differences in cats housed in single vs larger double compartment cages as early as the first 24 hours of stay. The more restrictive the housing, the shorter the time that that space will meet an animal's needs. Adequate space provided by double compartment housing can help support most animals' physical and mental well-being.

Keeping an animal's length of stay as short as possible is key to keeping them healthy and happy in restrictive housing. Animals that need to stay longer need longer-term housing and care needs met to maintain health and well-being. Always be aware that there are some individual animals for whom cage, and kennel housing simply does not meet their needs. Providing adequate care for these animals means alternative housing sometimes beyond the facility must be found as soon as possible.

## **Prevention of disease and disease transmission is a high priority when caring for a population of animals - yet few understand the critical role**

**housing plays.** Disease has more opportunity to occur in animals that are stressed. Restrictive housing inherently causes stress in animals and when this housing is such that it doesn't meet the animals' needs it can cause further stress. Some animals carry diseases that can be activated by stress- for example: many cats carry a virus (herpes virus) that awaits a stressful event or situation and subsequently results in illness: upper respiratory infection (URI) or a kitty cold. For a cat in a home, a cold is not often a big deal - most cats will recover in a week or two, but in a shelter - sick cats can get very sick and, in some places, they can be at risk for euthanasia.

Disease transmission risks occur when an infective organism gets passed from one animal to another. Vaccination at intake can help reduce risks by preventing and controlling disease. Limiting contact between animals also reduces disease risks. Limiting contact between animals can be achieved by housing animals individually and this is a common practice in most shelters, clinics and hospitals. A problem arises when individually housed animals must be handled when providing routine daily care – which is what generally needs to happen when animals are housed in single compartment housing units. Single compartment kennels cannot be cleaned without moving the dog out of its kennel and most single cages that house cats are too small to spot clean while the cat is inside.



Indoor / outdoor dog kennels  
with resinous epoxy coated  
dividing concrete walls

When animals are handled two things happen. First it can be a stressful time for the animal, especially when they haven't established a relationship with the care provider and second, the likelihood of passing an infectious organism from one animal to the next becomes a routine part of the daily care process. Handling animals one after another heightens disease transmission risks. Wearing appropriate gloves and changing between each animal might provide some help but its cumbersome to do – so it often isn't done properly - and it doesn't address contaminated clothing or shoes.

With double compartment housing much of the animal handling surrounding daily care (feeding and cleaning) can be reduced, thus a significant decrease in animal stress and disease risk can occur without anyone really having to think about it – it just works as it's part of the housing design.

Staff safety and humane animal care are both better provided when all animal housing is double compartment. Most double compartment housing for dogs provides the animal with retreat space built in on either side of the guillotine door (given that the guillotine door doesn't completely span the width of the kennel) and limited to no handling needs to occur for daily care. The animal can be located safely on one side of the housing unit (via use of a pass-through with the door closed) while the staff member safely tends to the care needs on the other side.

**Efficiency of care.** Staff efficiency during daily care not only reduces the stress for animals (cleaning time is a noisy time) but it opens up time for staff to do other important sheltering tasks- perhaps help more in outreach, or make phone calls to help lost dogs get back home, or work with animals that have more needs, any of a near endless list of tasks that often get put off because daily care is time consuming.

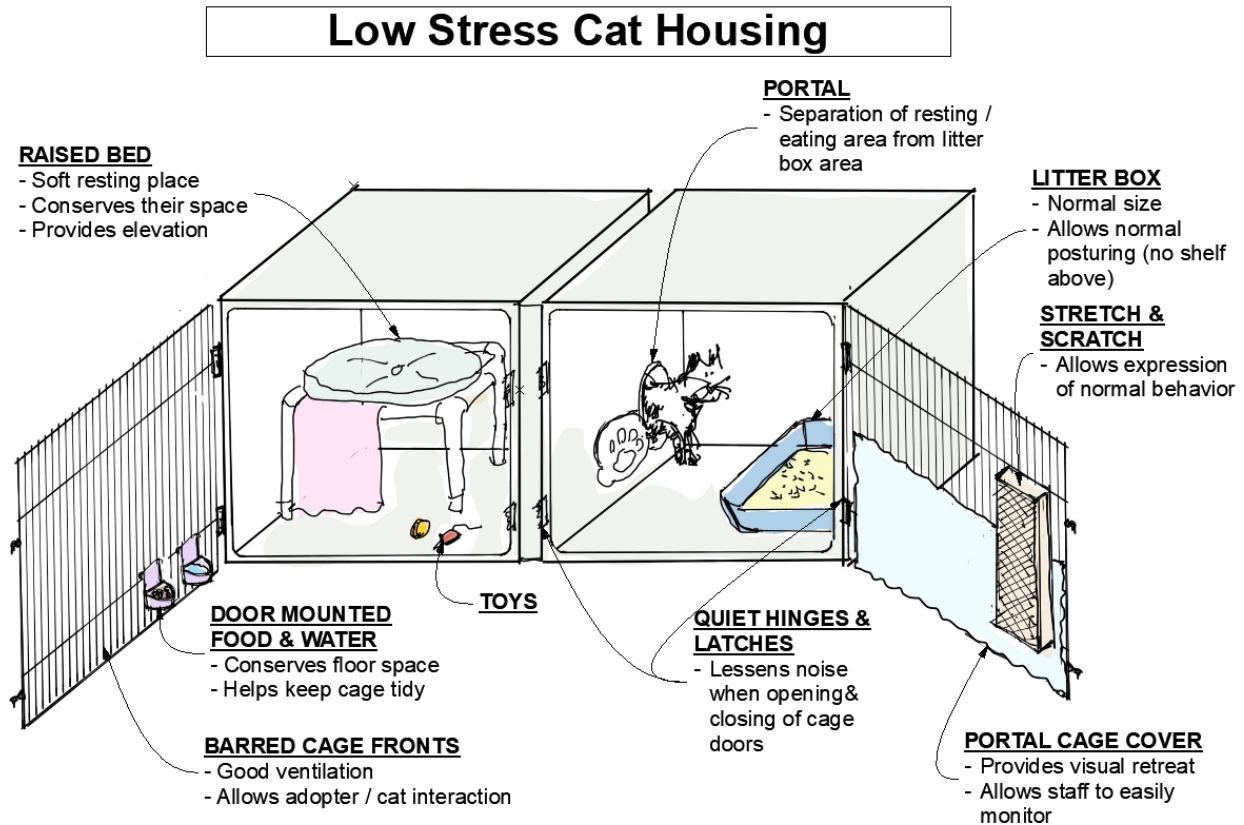


**Providing animals with double compartment housing** not only meets their needs and helps reduce stress but also provides staff with the safest, most efficient and humane way to care for pet animals when they are housed short-term in animal shelters, boarding facilities, veterinary hospitals and veterinary clinics... anywhere kennel or cage housing is used.

***Double compartment housing for pets is win/win-meeting the needs of the pets and those who care for them.***

### **Basic Amenities for Dogs and Cats in Kennel and Cage Housing:**

1. Good food
2. Clean water
3. Bed with bedding
4. Retreat space/visual choice/hiding space
5. Separate bathroom area/space
6. Toys of appropriate type

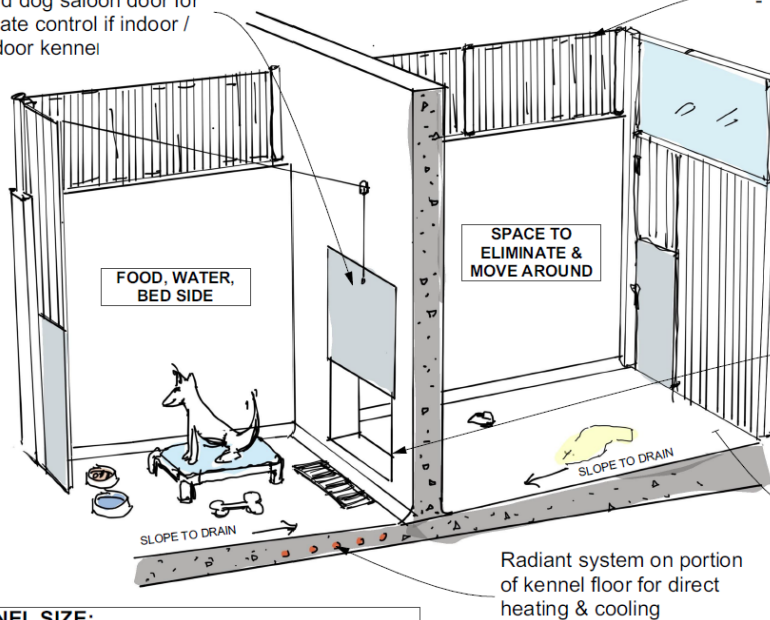


## Low Stress Dog Housing

- Back to Back Kennels -  
Indoor / Outdoor or Indoor / Indoor

### GUILLOTINE DOOR

- Add dog saloon door for climate control if indoor / outdoor kennel



### DIVIDING WALLS

- Upper portion open bars for good ventilation
- Lower portion solid to 4'-6" minimum
- Resinous epoxy coating, glazed block or other cleanable / disinfectable covering (no sealed concrete)

### KENNEL DOORS, BOTH SIDES

- Open bars for ventilation & interaction
- Portion with solid panel (provides visual choice for dog)
- Upper portion glass for easy observation

### PASS THROUGH DOOR

- Only spans portion of dividing wall to allow space for retreat

### FLOORS

- Single drain or properly designed trench drain (should not pass through adjacent kennel)
- Slope to drain
- Resinous epoxy coating or other durable / cleanable / disinfectable floor finish (no sealed concrete)

### KENNEL SIZE:

- Width: 4' min. Larger dogs need larger kennels, provide a few sized for 5'-6'w to give flexibility
- Length: 8' min. (4' + 4'), 10' good, 12' better
- Height: 6'-4" min. to allow staff access for care