

Understanding Hoarding



ST. LOUIS COUNTY

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

PROBLEM PROPERTIES UNIT

How do we get our referrals?



- Police
- Emergency Medical Services
- Fire Department
- Division of Aging
- Department of Family Services
- Case workers
- Family members, friends, neighbors

What does the Resource Coordinator do?



- Assists residents with abating violations
- Assists hoarders with resources, decluttering & organization

Hoarding

What is compulsive hoarding?



- Hoarding Disorder (HD) is a mental health disorder where people have difficulty getting rid of possessions that are no longer useful. Efforts to get rid of the items and not acquire new items causes distress.
- A person collects & keeps a lot of items, even things that appear useless or of little value to most people
- These items clutter the living spaces and keep the person from using their rooms as they were intended.
- These items cause distress or problems in day-to-day activities

-OCD Foundation

Hoarding statistics



- HD appears to affect men and women at similar rates
- HD is believed to be a universal phenomenon with consistent clinical features in all races, ethnicities, and cultures around the world.
- Hoarding symptoms appear to be almost three times more common in older adults (ages 55-94 years) compared to younger adults (ages 34-44 years), although hoarding symptoms can occur in young children as well.

OCD Foundation

Causes of Hoarding



- People who hoard process information in several unusual ways
- They pay attention to the unusual details
- Most of us organize our lives categorically-Hoarders organize things visually and spatially
- Hoarders have a creative streak – too much creativity

Causes of Hoarding (continued)



- The electricity bill is somewhere in the middle of this room in a pile about 1 foot down in the pile
- Hoarders have a difficult time making decisions
- Hoarders focus on the unusual details of a possession not its use – a bottle cap

Randy Frost, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology, Smith College

Hoarding Signs



- Outdoor clutter
- Overgrowth
- Windows in the home
- Resident usually comes outside from the back of the house
- Excessive amount of items in their vehicle
- Derelict vehicles on the property
- Poor hygiene
- Depressed
- Anxious
- Unable to control items

Common Code Violations



Fire Violations

- 3 foot wide pathways throughout home wide enough for safety personnel and stretcher to get through in case of emergency, and for firefighters to be able to fight fires safely.
- 3 foot space around any heat source (working or nonworking) and any materials that could catch fire.
- Nothing to be left anywhere on the surface of, or near stoves or cooking appliances. Nothing to be stored in ovens.
- All rodents which chew on electrical wires must be eliminated; this often causes fires.

Violations



Food preparation area is inadequate



Accumulation of rubbish



Fire Hazard in the Basement



Furnace area



Basement area



Common Code Violations



Health and Hygiene Standards

- No pests (including all rodents such as mice and rats) or the presence of squirrels, bats, or wild animals are allowed inside due to Hanta viruses, the possibility of rabies, and the spread of infectious diseases.
- No feces or urine-soaked rugs or floors, due to bacteria and ammonia odors (which cause breathing problems and disease) Un-neutered pets will “spray” their territory.
- No open garbage can be left around. Open garbage draws flies, fruit flies, roaches, and other insects, which spread disease. This includes open containers of food without lids.

Common Code Violations



Health and Hygiene Standards

- Rotten and smelly food attracts insects and rodents, as well, and must be discarded frequently in a closed garbage receptacle. It also poses a health hazard in that it may be mistakenly eaten, causing “C. Difficile”, a chronic diarrhea condition which is caused by a bacteria and is very hard to treat.
- Entrances and exits for rodents and pests must be blocked in order to prevent reinfestation
- Pets must be free of fleas and ticks
- Refrigerators & freezers must be in good working condition.

Interior of an 88-year olds home



Bathroom



Kitchen



Bedroom



Then



Now



Animal Hoarding





- Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine @ Tufts University, Medford, Maryland
- Dr. Patronek is a veterinary epidemiologist who first encountered animal hoarding in the late 1980's
- Founded the “Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium” (HARC) collaborated from 1997-2006
- This research group has written the bulk of the existing scientific literature on animal hoarding

Animal Hoarding



- Definition: “keeping a higher than usual number of animals as domestic pets without the ability to properly house or care for them.”
- Failure to provide adequate food and water, failure to provide necessary veterinary care to treat a disease or injury and failure to provide a sanitary environment are all prohibited by the animal cruelty laws in every state. Illinois and Hawaii mention animal hoarding in their cruelty statutes.

Animal Hoarding



- Almost every conceivable type of animal can be a victim of hoarding
- Domestic species are one of the largest groups of animals represented in hoarding cases.
- Cats are very common and contribute to the stereotype; easily available and easiest to conceal
- Most hoarders tend to concentrate on one species

Animal Hoarding



- HOMES (Health, Obstacles, Mental Health, Endangerment, Structure and Safety) Scale developed by Dr. Christiana Bratiotis.
- This tool allows rapid assessment of multiple issues related to any type of hoarding case
- Another scale specifically targeted to canine welfare is Tufts Animal Care & Condition Scales. This scale is designed to assess a dog's body condition, physical health, environmental condition, sanitation, weather, temperature, safety and physical care

Animal Hoarding



- Therapy for animal hoarding is still in very early stages and there have been no controlled studies of treating animal hoarding
- There are few people in the country who have significance experience treating animal hoarding

Animal Hoarding – How you can help



- Call local humane society, police, animal welfare organization or veterinarian
- Contact social service groups
- Reassure the animal hoarder its okay to accept help
- Volunteer time
- Keep in touch

Animal Hoarding Resources



- Pet-abuse.com – database shows hoarders are becoming more likely to receive jailtime if convicted
- Animal Legal Defense Fund – staff attorneys who can consult with prosecutors about how to approach any case of animal abuse. The website also provides sample legal pleadings and briefs
- International Veterinary Forensics Sciences Association – organization closely allied with (ASPCA) American Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

Hoarding Statistics



- 2-6% of the world population displays clinical hoarding, increasing .25% per year
- There are currently 1.5 million hoarders in the U.S.
- Co-occurring psychiatric disorders occur in up to 92% of individuals meeting diagnostic criteria for hoarding disorder. This includes anxiety, depression, social phobia, OCD, and PTSD
- Hoarding is not a result of dementia
- There is little evidence for history of material deprivation – depression era
- Hoarding may be precipitated by loss – pretty common

Hoarding Statistics



- 55% report experiencing a stressful event at onset of hoarding symptoms
- 75% of hoarders engage in excessive buying
- 50% excessively acquire free items
- 15% acknowledge their behavior is irrational
- Around 75% of individuals who have HD have a co-occurring mental health condition
- Around 25% of people with HD also have OCD
- Perfectionism is seen in approximately 80%

Demographics & Features



- Education – ranges widely
- Martial status – tend to be single, low marriage rate, high divorce rate
- Average age – 50
- Tend to live alone
- Family history of hoarding is common
- Squalid conditions is uncommon among treatment seekers

Dr. Gail Steketee

Professor & Dean at Boston University in the School of Social Work

HOW are hoarding issues approached?



- Gentle approach
- Gain resident's TRUST!
- Demonstrate respect
- Explain thoroughly what must be done
- Focus on positive outcome
- Resident is in charge. It is their house, their things
- People with HD usually have problems with organizing, problem solving, and making decisions

What NOT to do



- Expect a reasonable response
- Touch their possessions without their permission (except animals)
- Refer to the resident as a hoarder
- Remove their items when they are not present
- Refer to their items as trash, junk or crap

Unsafe Sleeping Area



Before



After



Effects of Hoarding



- Unable to clean their property
- Socially isolated
- Fire and fall danger
- Danger to fire fighters
- Fire danger to neighboring houses
- Vermin infestation
- Neighborhood property values

If resident does not cooperate:



- ❖ Could be vacated from the property if there are any of the following violations:
 - * unsanitary conditions
 - * illegal sleeping areas
 - * accumulation of rubbish
 - * defective sanitary drains
 - * no utilities
 - * dangerous wiring
 - * obstructed egress
 - * food preparation area inadequate
- ❖ Alternative living facility may be needed

Unsanitary conditions

Food preparation area is inadequate

Before



After



Can Hoarding be treated?



- Challenge the hoarder's thoughts and beliefs about the need to keep items and about collecting new things
- Go out without buying or picking up new items
- Get rid of and recycle clutter. First, practice the removal of clutter with the help of a clinician or coach and then independently remove clutter
- Find and join a support group or team up with a coach to sort and reduce clutter
- **UNDERSTAND THAT RELAPSE CAN OCCUR**
- Develop a plan to prevent future clutter

Helping A Family Member Who Is A Hoarder



- Best approach is to sit down and talk with them about the problem in a calm and reasonable way
- The worst thing to do is to volunteer to go in and throw things away for them or to go in and throw things away when they are not around
- The goal is to educate the loved one about hoarding behavior as a problem and to try to do something to reduce the risks associated with hoarding

Helping A Family Member Who Is A Hoarder (continued)

A decorative white circle with a teal outline, positioned centrally below the title and above the list of bullet points.

- The ideal situation would be to get the family member into a hoarding treatment program
- A family needs to pull back and not be so pushy about throwing things away
- The key is to get the hoarder to recognize and understand there is a problem

Randy Frost, Ph.D.

Professor of Psychology, Smith College

Questions to ask:



- 1) Do I need this?
- 2) Can I afford it?
- 3) Do I have room for it?
- 4) Do I have something at home that serves the same purpose?

Asking these questions interrupts the impulse to buy.

What next?



- Regular follow up in-home visits
- Funding is needed to assist these residents with in-home psychological therapy; corporations, universities
- More individuals are needed to coach and assist in decluttering & organizing

Researchers



Animal Hoarding

Gary Patronek, VMD, PhD – Veterinarian at Cummings
School of Veterinary Medicine – Tufts University –
Medford, Maryland

OCD, Hoarding Disorder, and OC Spectrum Disorders

Sanjaya Saxena, MD
Psychiatry & Neurology
UC San Diego Health
LaJolla, California

Problem Properties Unit Teams



North Area

- Officer Jasper Dase – (314) 405-0487
- Specialist – Phil Jones (314) 810-4919

Central Area

- Officer Robert Rinck – (314) 486-8928
- Specialist –

South Area

- Officer Tim Rehagen – (314) 713-4395
- Specialist – Jeff Young (314) 486-8912

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