



This brochure is intended to provide information about hoarding and available resources for the community.



Hoarding (or compulsive or pathological hoarding) is a term which is used to describe extreme hoarding behavior in humans. It involves the collection or failure to discard large numbers of objects or animals, even when their storage causes significant clutter and impairment to basic living activities such as moving around the house, cooking, cleaning or sleeping.

While there is no current agreed upon definition of compulsive hoarding in accepted diagnostic criteria, most experts describe the following defining features:

- The acquisition of, and failure to discard, a large number of possessions (objects or animals) that appear to be useless or of limited value
- Living spaces sufficiently cluttered so as to preclude activities for which those spaces were designed
- Significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding

There is no "cure" for compulsive hoarding, meaning there is no treatment that will make the problem go away completely and never come back at all. Research on the psychopathology of hoarding has helped define the components of this problem, but as yet, little is known about age and reasons for onset, family history, course of this disorder and insight into the problem.

WHY IS HOARDING IMPORTANT?

Hoarding is a complex and multifaceted behavioral problem that may make itself known in a number of different ways. Hoarding creates a number of health and safety hazards. Hoarding homes may exhibit a range from simple clutter to ones that require a HAZMAT response. Hoarding creates hazardous conditions that can increase the risk of fire and block entry by public safety personnel. The accumulation of combustible materials, such as newspapers, clothing and rubbish, can pose a severe fire hazard. The amount of combustible materials creates an extremely hot, fast-spreading fire that is difficult to suppress. Escaping the home in a fire can be impossible due to blocked hallways, doorways and windows. In addition, public safety personnel's access to the home can be hampered or blocked. Additionally, hoarding may cause structural damage to buildings. Hoarding can present significant health hazards and can cause disease or injury to the hoarder, family members and the community. Hoarding can be a potential indicator of mental health problems such as OCD and dementia. Finally, clean-up of hoarding homes can be extremely costly for landlords and local governments.

As hoarding is a multi-faceted issue requiring multi-faceted responses, effective interventions require a community-coordinated response. A coordinated response allows for a more effective and comprehensive response to hoarding in a jurisdiction. Hoarding is a complex and multi-faceted behavioral problem that may make itself known in a number of different ways.

Hoarders may express themselves by hoarding objects or animals. Hoarders themselves may be young or elderly. Hoarding homes may exhibit a range from simple clutter to ones that require a HAZMAT response. Therefore, in order for a jurisdiction to effectively deal with this issue, all of the agencies that may either discover, intervene or treat hoarders must coordinate their response.

SIGNS OF HOARDING:

- Extreme collection and storage of items in the home and in the yard
- Accumulation of combustible materials (newspapers, magazines and rubbish)
- Blocked exits (doors/windows)
- Narrow pathways in the home
- Rat and/or insect infestations
- Rotting food and/or used food containers
- Human and/or animal waste
- Long-term neglect of home maintenance
- Non-working utilities, such as heat, running water, sewer, refrigeration⁵

Animal Hoarding by definition is a condition in which animals are deprived of even minimal care. The degree of deprivation varies in each situation, depending on how long it occurs before discovery. As conditions deteriorate and crowding increases, irritating odors develop from accumulated feces and urine, disease may spread, injuries are not treated, sick animals are ignored and the early stages of starvation begin. As conditions worsen,

animals die from starvation and untreated illness or injury. It is not unusual for dead animals to be found among the living with cannibalization having begun. Even when confronted with how they are living - feces deep on the floor, dead animals laying about the home, and other horrendous conditions - the hoarder often fails to recognize there is anything wrong

SIGNS OF ANIMAL HOARDING:

- There are a large number of animals present.
- The caretaker does not provide the minimal standards of care, and neglect often results in starvation and death.
- The caretaker is neither able to provide this minimum care nor able to appreciate the impact of this on the animals, the household and the human occupants of the dwelling.
- The caretaker fails to act or recognize the negative impact of the collection on themselves, others and the animals.
 - There is often an extreme difference between the hoarder's public persona and his/her clandestine private life.
 - Unless expert psychiatric help is obtained, recidivism is common and hoarders usually return to old ways, even if convicted of cruelty to animals.



PROBLEMS OR OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

Dealing with hoarding cases can be extremely complex. Intervention with hoarders must take place at several levels and there is a consistent reported amount of repetition and recidivism with hoarders.

Hoarding can cause a variety of complications, including:

- Unsanitary conditions that pose a risk to health
- Increased risk of falls
- An inability to perform daily tasks, such as bathing or cooking
- Poor work performance
- Family conflicts
- Loneliness and social isolation
- A fire hazard



RISK FACTORS

•**Age.** Hoarding usually starts in early adolescence, around age 13 or 14, and it tends to get worse with age. Hoarding may even start earlier than the teen years. Younger children may start saving items, such as broken toys, pencil nubs, outdated school papers and broken appliances.

•**Family history.** There is a very strong association between having a family member who is a compulsive hoarder and becoming a hoarder yourself.

•**Stressful life events.** Some people develop hoarding after experiencing a stressful life event that they had difficulty coping with, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, eviction or losing possessions in a fire.

•**A history of alcohol abuse.** About half of hoarders have a history of alcohol dependence.

• **Social isolation.** People who hoard are typically socially withdrawn and isolated. In many cases, the hoarding leads to social isolation. But, on the other hand, some people may turn to the comfort of hoarding because they're lonely.

A Hoarding Task Force combines the resources of county agencies to provide a coordinated response to residential hoarding when it threatens life, safety and property. The following agencies are available for assistance:

Morgantown Code Enforcement
304-284-7401

Morgantown Police Department
304-284-7552 option 0

Morgantown Fire Department
304-284-7480

Mon-County Health Department
304-291-9571

Valley Mental Health
304-296-1731

Mon Co. Homeland Security Emergency Management MECCA 304-599-6382

Bartlett House
304-292-0101



**City of
Morgantown**

Department of Code Enforcement
389 Spruce Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
Office: 304-284-7401 or 304-290-7268
Fax: 304-284-7380
Email: tmicheal@cityofmorgantown.org
www.morgantownwv.gov

City of Morgantown

**Hoarding:
A dangerous
secret**



**Code Enforcement
Department**

304-284-7401