



Communications Office

The City of Morgantown

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Morgantown Initiates WV's First Municipal Hoarding Task Force

The group will work together on hoarding cases to prevent recurring problems.

MORGANTOWN – The City of Morgantown has become the first municipality in the state to start a Hoarding Task Force.

Headed by Code Enforcement Officer Tammy Michael, under the direction of Chief Code Enforcement Officer Mike Stone, the Task Force was created to more completely address hoarding cases that each department of the city experience in their daily work. Stone read a recent article in a code enforcement newsletter that highlighted Los Vegas' work with hoarding, approached Officer Michael to help create a group made of city departments that would not just get the problem addressed, but solved.

“The closest Hoarding Task Force is in Virginia,” Michael said. “We’re very excited and very proud to be able to start helping people here in our own state, and we know it will bloom outside city limits.”

Officer Michael spoke to city departments and agencies who she thought would work well on this task force and found that each group has different issues with hoarding. Those participating in the task force with Code Enforcement are the Development Services Department, the Police and Fire Departments, Monongalia County Health Department, Valley Health Care, and the Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. Michael said the initial group also met with a family member of a resident affected by hoarding to get a personal look at why hoarding is such a different issue than many they may encounter.

Michael says that each case is different, but each agency has its own approach and responsibilities in a hoarding situation, and bringing them together into what she calls a “brother system” will help to address all aspects of a hoarding issue from the beginning.

“When a housing problem is reported to Code Enforcement, we go out, inspect it, write a violation, it’s over. But with a hoarding problem, you can’t leave it at that,” she said. “It’s personal. You can’t give them 20 days to get it cleaned up, and if not, fine them. You can’t have 40 years of memories taken care of in 20 days.”

Michael said that because of the sensitive nature of hoarding, each group is going to be offering a little help to assist these people in the recovery process. She said that Allied Waste plans to help with a dumpster to clean the property out. Valley Health Care is offering counseling services. Code Enforcement is willing to help with small home maintenance issues, like mowing.

Additionally, Code Enforcement officers will be undergoing additional training for dealing with these types of secret, private, and sensitive situations.

“We don’t want residents to feel as though their problem is taboo,” she said. “Hoarding is nothing to be ashamed of, and we’d like to be able to help them find a positive outcome and a long-lasting solution.”

Currently, the group is compiling a list of known hoarding locations in the City. It’s also registering with the International Exchange on Hoarding (www.hoardingtaskforce.org) so anyone in the nation with concerns about relatives living here can reach out directly to the Morgantown Task Force. Info packets will be compiled to provide landlords, WVU students, and concerned residents with a direct connection to the help they or a neighbor or family member might need.

If you have questions, please contact Tammy Michael, Code Enforcement Officer, at 304-291-7401 or tmichael@cityofmorgantown.org.

