

Hazards of Hoarding



Many of us accumulate possessions, but some collect items to an extreme. People who have persisting difficulty in discarding possessions, regardless of their actual value, may have a hoarding disorder and living conditions may become cramped, unmanageable, or unhealthy.

As the number of items filling a home increases, so do the hazards to residents and emergency responders. Many rooms are so filled with possessions that residents can no longer use them as designed. Hoarding makes fighting fires and searching for occupants far more difficult.

Potential fire and safety threats:

- Cooking is unsafe if flammable items are too close to the stove or oven.
- Heating units may be too close to things that can burn.
- Piles of possessions blocking doors, exits, hallways, and stairways may hinder escape or rescue from a fire.



In South Carolina, an estimated one out of every five fire deaths lists hoarding as a contributing factor.

Bringing Order to a Hoarder



A hoarding disorder ranges from mild to severe. In some cases, hoarding may or may not pose a large problem.

FIRST STEPS in helping a hoarder is to:

- Start a conversation and share your concerns for their well-being.
- Focus on safety issues, such as fire and fall hazards.
- Have residents make a home escape plan and practice it often.

Community resources are also available. Talk to members of the local fire department to alert them of any concerns. Work together with mental health and community service providers, as well as family members and other organizations, to help reduce the risk.

Tackle the Clutter: Five Cleaning Tips

- **Track which items you actually use.** Over the course of a year, when you use or wear an item, put it back facing the opposite direction. If you haven't used it, get rid of it.
- **Forget about costs.** If you can't get your money back, ask yourself if it adds value to your life.
- **Does the item work?** If it doesn't work properly or if the electrical cord is damaged, dispose of it.
- **Start with small projects.** Start with cleaning out a "junk drawer" or under the sink.
- **Before discarding, pause** a few hours and decide no later than the next day if there is an item you can't live without.