Hoardings – Fire & Safety Hazards

“A new phenomenon or better awareness?”

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Canadian Regional Director
NFPA
• NFPA Journal cover story Jan/Feb 2012
What is Hoarding?

1. The acquisition of, and failure to discard, a large number of possessions that appear to be of useless or of limited value
2. Living spaces are so cluttered that they can’t be used for their intended purpose
3. Significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the hoarding (e.g., can’t use kitchen or bathroom, problems with landlord, fights with family)

Frost & Hartl, 1996
Why be Concerned?

- Risk of fire and life safety to occupants
- Potential to expand beyond the property

Photos source – Fairfax County Virginia website
September 24th, 2010
Toronto, ON – 200 Wellesley

- 30 storey – 713 unit building – Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)
- Unit 2424 – one bedroom 560 ft² apt
- Six alarm blaze
- More than 1,200 residents, many suffering physical and mental health ailments, were displaced for weeks and months
- 17 Injured
Toronto Wellesley Fire
September 24th, 2010
Toronto, ON – 200 Wellesley

• The Fire Marshal’s report pegs the damage at over $1 million. (does not consider indirect costs)

• $80 M lawsuit launched against TCHC and the property manager
More Than Just One Incident
Melbourne, Australia Study

• Of the district’s fires from 1999 to 2009, only 48 or .25% were in hoarding households. However, these fires accounted for 24 percent of preventable fire fatalities during this period.*

• Fires were contained to the room of origin in 90% percent of all residential fires. In hoarding homes, however, that percentage dropped to 40%, indicating that hoarded materials promote the spread of fire through a dwelling.

• Hoarding-related fires required an average of 2.6 pumpers and 17.1 personnel, compared to 1.5 pumpers and 7.7 personnel for residential blazes.
More Than Just One Incident
Melbourne, Australia Study

- The estimated average damage amount of a residential fire was $12,500, while hoarding fires averaged $100,000.
- The cost to the MFB per fire was $2,100 for residential fires, compared to $34,000 for hoarding fires—more than 16 times the cost.
- Only 26 percent of hoarding households had a working smoke alarm, compared to the household average of 66 percent.

WPI Study available at: web.cs.wpi.edu/~rek/Projects/MFB_D09.pdf
Not a New Phenomenon

The problem is that we may be more aware of the changing nature of contents
Risks Associated with Combustibles in Dwelling Units

Factors contributing to the risks?

– Client cannot easily escape, if at all
– Materials absorb water and double or triple in weight
– Promote rapid fire spread
– Increased smoke development
– Entrapment
– Windows/Doors blocked or sealed shut from rare use.
Photos source – Fairfax County Virginia website
The Challenges
Collectors vs. Hoarders

Collecting
• Possessions do not interfere with living space
• Possessions are organized
• Possessions are grouped in meaningful categories

Hoarder
• Possessions interfere with living space
• Possessions are disorganized
• Possessions do not have meaningful groupings
Hoardings & Residential Fire Sprinklers

- Residential fire sprinklers are low flow patterns designed for life safety. Facilitate the evacuation of occupants.
- Not designed to suppress a fire typical in hoarding cases.
- Increasing structural load.
Is the Problem Unique to Public Housing?

• No necessarily
• Unique factors might make it more prevalent because of background mental diseases but can just as easily occur in private property
• Unique challenges in each case
• Better ability to effect the outcome
Hoardding and the Private Residence

• Often contacted by family members seeking public to intervene

• If in a private residence it creates unique “rights” concerns that poses some challenges for the fire service
  – We normally do not inspect SFDs
  – Educational campaigns only
  – Is it a threat to other properties?
How Common is Hoarding?

• Very common - Between 1 in 20 up to 1 in 50 people may have a hoarding problem

Where do we see hoarding?

• Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
• Depression
• Brain injury
• Psychotic disorders

From presentation: Hoarding by Karen Rowa, Ph.D., C.Psych.
Anxiety Treatment and Research Centre, St. Joseph’s Healthcare, Hamilton November 23, 2011
Types of Hoarding
www.ocfoundation.org

- **OCD-based Hoarding**
- **Hoarding in Older Adulthood**
- **Animal Hoarding**

Hoarding is often associated with some form of mental illness. To think that we in the fire service can change this behavior without treating the cause of the mental illness is naive.
### Typology of animal hoarding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Overwhelmed caregiver** | - Some awareness, more reality-based  
  - More passive acquisition  
  - Problems often triggered by change in circumstance  
  - Unable to problem-solve effectively  
  - Likely to be socially isolated  
  - Self-esteem linked to role as caregiver  
  - Fewer issues with authorities |
| **Rescuer Hoarder**      | - Mission leading to unavoidable compulsion  
  - Fear of death  
  - Active vs. passive acquisition  
  - S/he is the only one who can provide care  
  - Rescue-followed-by adoption becomes rescue-only care  
  - May have extensive network of enablers or be a group activity |
| **Exploiter Hoarder**    | - Tends to have sociopathic characteristics  
  - Lacks empathy for people or animals  
  - Indifferent to harm caused  
  - Rejects outsiders’ concerns  
  - Superficial charm and charisma  
  - Lacks guilt or remorse  
  - Manipulative and cunning  
  - Adopts role of expert with need to control |

*From: Animal Hoarding: Structuring interdisciplinary responses to help people, animals, and communities at risk. Patronek, Loar, Nathanson, eds. 2006*
Diogenes Syndrome vs. Hoarding

Diogenes Syndrome
• Hoarding is one symptom of this problem
• Older adults (60+)
• More likely to live in filthy environments
• Less emotional attachment to things

Hoarding
• Hoarding is the main issue
• Any age
• Only some live in filthy environments
• More emotional attachment to things

From presentation: Hoarding by Karen Rowa, Ph.D., C.Psych. Anxiety Treatment and Research Centre, St. Joseph’s Healthcare, Hamilton November 23, 2011
Collection of Best Practices

• No definitive guide

• Collection of comments and feedback on PTSC-Online (NFPA section)
What doesn’t work?

Large scale clean-ups without the client’s permission do not work

Large scale clean-ups even with the client’s permission may not work

There are no medications proven to be effective for hoarding yet
What does work?

Cognitive behavioural therapy

But...

– Hard to access
– Usually a > 6 month commitment
– Requires insight and motivation
How do you assess a hoarding situation?
Immediate Threat to Life

• Reasonable and probable grounds to believe that a risk of fire poses an immediate threat to life
  – Risk of fire (ignition source)
  – Probability that fire would endanger life

• Problem is lack of quantitative tools in the Fire Codes

May be situational
Is this an imminent threat to life?
Clutter Image Rating: Bedroom
Please select the photo that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.

Downloadable at: Treatments That Work
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVE L</th>
<th>Structure and Zoning</th>
<th>Animals and Pests</th>
<th>Household Functions</th>
<th>Health and Safety</th>
<th>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL I</td>
<td>All doors, stairs and windows accessible; plumbing, electric and HVAC operational; fire and CO2 detectors installed and functional</td>
<td>Normal animal control (behavior/sanitation); approved number of animals; no evidence of rodents or insects</td>
<td>No excessive clutter; all rooms properly used; appliances functional; good housekeeping and maintenance</td>
<td>Safe, sanitary; no odors; medication control OK</td>
<td>OPTIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL II</td>
<td>1 major exit blocked; 1 major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season; some plumbing or electrical systems not fully functional; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional</td>
<td>Evidence of inappropriate animal control; visible or odorous pet waste; visible pet fur/hair/feathers; light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects</td>
<td>Clutter beginning to obstruct living areas; slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; at least one room not being used for intended purpose; several appliances not functional; inconsistent housekeeping and maintenance</td>
<td>Diminished appropriate sanitation; odors from dirty dishes, food prep, laundry, toilets; mildew present; medication control questionable</td>
<td>LIGHT PPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL III</td>
<td>Outside clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one season; fire or CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; one part of home has light structural damage (occurring within past six mos.)</td>
<td>Animal population exceeds local regulations; inappropriate animal control; inadequate sanitation; audible evidence of pests; medium level of spiders; light insect infestation such as Bed bugs, lice, fleas, roaches, ants, silverfish, spiders, etc.</td>
<td>Clutter obstructing functions of key living areas; building up around exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; at least one room not being used for intended purpose; several appliances not functional; inappropriate usage of electric appliances and extension cords; substandard housekeeping and maintenance; hazardous substances in small quantities</td>
<td>Limited evidence of maintaining sanitation (heavily soiled food prep areas, dirty dishes, mildew); odors obvious and irritating; garbage cans not in use or overflowing; dirt, dust and debris; dirty laundry throughout house; Rx and OTC medications hazardous control (re children, pets, mentally impaired)</td>
<td>MEDIUM PPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL IV</td>
<td>Excessive outdoor clutter of items normally stored indoors; HVAC devices not working for longer than one year; CO2 detectors non-existent or non-functional; structural damage to home lasting longer than six months; water damaged floors, damaged walls and foundations, broken windows, doors or plumbing; odor or evidence of sewer backup</td>
<td>Animal population exceeds local ordinances; poor animal sanitation; destructive behavior; excessive spiders and webs; bats, squirrels, rodents in attic or basement (audible and visible); medium insect infestation</td>
<td>Diminished use and accessibility to key living areas; several rooms cluttered to extent they cannot be used for intended purposes; clutter inhibits access to doorways, hallways and stairs; inappropriate storage of hazardous/ combustible materials; appliances used inappropriately; improper use of electric space heaters, fans or extension cords</td>
<td>Rotting food, organic contamination; expired, leaking cans or bottles, buckled sides and tops; dishes and utensils unusable; no linens on beds; sleeping on mattress, chair or floor; infestation of bedding and/or furniture; medications Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody</td>
<td>FULL PPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL V</td>
<td>Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery; ventilation inadequate or nonexistent; HVAC systems not working; water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors or plumbing; unreliable electrical, water and/ or septic systems; odor or sewer backup; irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure</td>
<td>Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior; health and numbers; pervasive spiders, cockroaches, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc.; heavy infestation of insects such as bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.</td>
<td>Key living spaces not usable; all rooms not used for intended purposes; entrances, hallways and stairs blocked; toilets, sinks and tubs not functioning; hazardous conditions obscured by clutter; appliances unusable; hazardous and primitive use of kerosene, lanterns, candles, fireplace/ woodstove as primary source of heat and/ or light</td>
<td>Human urine and excrement present; rotting food; organic contamination; cans or jars expired, leaking or buckled; dishes and utensils buried or nonexistent; beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation; pervasive mold and/ or mildew; moisture or standing water; Rx and OTC medications easily accessible to anybody; presence of expired Rx</td>
<td>FULL PPE REQUIRED</td>
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Fire Service Powers

- Entry without a warrant
- Orders to remedy the situation

Unfortunately experience shows the ability to remedy the situation under these acts is not very successful. Other tools might be eviction for cause under the *Residential Tenancy Act*... but...
Charter of Rights and Freedoms

• Section 7 “Fundamental Justice”
• “right to full and proper disclosure”
• “right to due process”
• “laws not be arbitrary or overly vague”
On complaint of a person interested or, if believed advisable, without complaint, the fire commissioner and the commissioner's inspectors may at all reasonable hours enter any premises anywhere in British Columbia to inspect them and ascertain whether or not any of the following conditions exist:
BC Fire Services Act 1996

Inspection of fire hazards 21

21. (a) the premises are in a state of disrepair that a fire starting in them might spread rapidly to endanger life or other property;

(b) the premises are so used or occupied that fire would endanger life or property;

(c) combustible or explosive material is kept or other flammable conditions exist on the premises so as to endanger life or property;

(d) a fire hazard exists on the premises.

NOTE: Only fire safety hazards not life safety or public health
(1) After an inspection the fire commissioner, or an inspector with the fire commissioner's authority, may in writing order that within a reasonable time, to be set by the order,

(a) if section 21 (a) applies, the owner remove or destroy the premises, or the owner or occupier repair the premises,
(b) if section 21 (b) applies, the owner or occupier alter the use or occupancy of the premises,
(c) if section 21 (c) applies, the occupier remove or keep securely the combustible or explosive material or remedy the flammable conditions, and
(d) if section 21 (d) applies, the owner or occupier remove or take proper precautions against the fire hazard.
(2) After the receipt of an order, the owner, occupier or person in charge must comply with it.

(3) Subject to an agreement to the contrary,
(a) the cost of complying with an order must be borne by the owner, and
(b) if the occupier pays the cost, the occupier has a right of action or set off against the owner for the cost actually and necessarily paid in complying with the order.
Local Assistants

• A local assistant may, in the municipality or part of British Columbia for which he or she is a local assistant, exercise the powers conferred by sections 21 and 22 and, with the written approval of the fire commissioner, the powers conferred by section 23.
45. (1) An owner or occupier of a building or premises who fails to comply with an order made under this Act commits an offence.

(2) A person who commits an offence under subsection (1) is liable on conviction to the penalties provided in the Offence Act.

(3) In the case of a continuing offence, a person who commits the offence is liable to a further penalty of not more than $50 for each day during which the offence continues.
Response to Hoarding

• Consistency in approach yet recognition that every client will be different.
• Understand what/who it is you are dealing with.
• Understand your role, and remember your purpose.
• YOU CAN’T DO IT ALONE!
The Task Force Approach

• Over 90 TFs set up in North America to date
• Number of Task Forces set up in Canada
  – Ottawa, Toronto, Durham region, ON
  – Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge, AB
  – Greater Vancouver Area
  – Brandon, MB
• No standard for composition of the task forces
• The mission, goals and functions vary but all provide a directed and managed response to hoarding cases that come to public attention.
Common Elements

• Municipal fire departments, Police Service, staff members from the health department and mental health professionals to address the needs of individuals identified in hoarding cases.

• The approach of the task force balances a reduction of the hazards emergency officials confront in hoarding cases with a compassionate approach to those who do it.

• Means to identify potential hoarders to the task force.
Take Home Messages

• Helping people who hoard takes a long time, and lots of patience
• Successful change involves eliminating clutter, organizing, and reducing acquiring
• It is never useful to throw things away or organize things without the person’s permission
• Treatment can help, but it doesn’t fix everything – keep expectations reasonable
• Annual meeting session will focus on hoarding
• NFPA’s Urban Fire Safety Task Force, the Education Section, and the Public Fire Protection Division expressed interest in the issue. For more on the event, including education sessions, visit nfpa.org/conference.
PTSC-Online

- NFPA became a gold level sponsor in 2011
- Dedicated NFPA section on the site
- Use for policy development and sharing materials

Presentation and an opportunity to participate in a discussion forum available at: www.PTSC-Online.ca
Conclusion

• Need to determine when it has become an imminent fire and life safety concern
• The current fire prevention tools are very effective in intervening
• The solution is not just with the fire inspection division but with a community task force.
CONTACTING US

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  (613) 841 - 1929 (F)
  stracey@nfpa.org

• Web sites: www.nfpa.org

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www.PTSC-Online.ca
LIST OF NFPA CODES & STANDARDS

All NFPA Codes and Standards:

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<td>Fire Code</td>
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<td>NFPA 2</td>
<td>Hydrogen Technologies Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPA 3</td>
<td>Recommended Practice on Commissioning and Integrated Testing of Fire Protection and Life Safety Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPA 4</td>
<td>Standard for Integrated Testing of Fire Protection Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPA 10</td>
<td>Standard for Portable Fire Extinguishers</td>
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<td>NFPA 11A</td>
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<td>NFPA 12</td>
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<td>NFPA 12A</td>
<td>Standard on Halon 1301 Fire Extinguishing Systems</td>
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<td>NFPA 13</td>
<td>Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPA 13A</td>
<td>Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems in One- and Two-Family Dwellings and Manufactured Homes</td>
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<td>Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems in Residential Occupancies up to and Including Four Stories in Height</td>
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<td>NFPA 14</td>
<td>Standard for the Installation of Standpipes and Hose Systems</td>
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<td>Standard for Water Spray Fixed Systems for Fire Protection</td>
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<td>NFPA 16</td>
<td>Standard for the Installation of Foam-Water Sprinkler and Foam-Water Spray Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFPA 17</td>
<td>Standard for Dry Chemical Extinguishing Systems</td>
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NFPA 101: LIFE SAFETY CODE®

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Committee members: Sign in to view your documents

Edition to display: 2012

Document information
- Next edition
- Technical Committee
- Technical Questions

View the document online (read only)
- View the 2012 edition online

Frequently Asked Questions
- View the FAQs

Archived revision information
- Read the archived revision Information

Tentative Interim Amendment (TIA)
- TIA 12.1 issued: 9/11/2011 (PDF, 79.0 KB)
- See SC Decision #11-19 below for more information on TIA 12-1

Standards Council Decisions
- Dec11-18, Decision on Council Agenda Item 11-9-24-d (PDF, 101.2 KB)

The next edition of this standard is now open for Public Input (formerly proposals)

Documents according Public Input (formerly proposals)

2012 NFPA 101: Life Safety Code Essentials Focus on Occupancies Seminar with Certificate of Educational Achievement 5-day Seminar

Learn how to apply requirements and help ensure occupant safety through compliance with the 2012 edition of NFPA 101.

Item #: LO55

Choose Date and Location

CUSTOMERS ALSO BOUGHT