

Hoarding and Its Impact on Individual Quality of Life

CINDY J. NATSCH

Founder, Let's Get Moving!



What is Compulsive Hoarding?

“Compulsive hoarding is a common and potentially disabling problem characterized by the accumulation of excessive clutter, to the point that parts one’s home can no longer be used for their intended purpose.”

Hartford Hospitals- Connecticut

*“The ache for home lives in all of us;
the safe place where we can go as we are
and not be questioned.”*

- Maya Angelou



Clutter – Hoarding Scale™

ICD
CLUTTER — HOARDING SCALE
FIVE CATEGORIES.

Structure and Zoning Assessment of access to entrances and exits; function of plumbing, electrical, HVAC (any aspect of heating, ventilation or air conditioning) systems and appliances; and structural integrity
Animals and Pests Assessment of animal care and control; compliance with local animal regulations; assessment for evidence of infestations of pests (rodents, insects or other vermin)
Household Functions Assessment of safety, functionality and accessibility of rooms for intended purposes
Health and Safety Assessment of sanitation levels in household; household management of medications for prescribed (Rx) and/or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Recommendations for PPE (face masks, gloves, eye shields or clothing that protect wearer from environmental health and safety hazards); additional supplies as appropriate to observational level
SCOPE OF SCALE PURPOSE OF SCALE: This document is to be used as an assessment/guideline tool only, specifically for use in the assessment of a home's interior, except where the outside structure affects the overall safety of the interior. Does not include sheds, unattached garages or outbuildings. It is not to be used for diagnostic purposes or for any psychological evaluation of a person or persons. The ICD is not responsible for any work performed by a professional organizer or other related professional using the ICD CHS or CHS Quick Reference Guide.

ICD
CLUTTER — HOARDING SCALE
FIVE LEVELS.

Five progressive levels indicate the degree of household clutter and/or hoarding; Level I as the lowest, and Level V the highest. The ICD considers Level III as the pivot point between a household that might be assessed as cluttered, and a household environment that may require the deeper considerations of working in a hoarding environment.

LEVEL I	GREEN	LOW
Household environment is considered standard. No special knowledge in working with the chronically disorganized is necessary.		

LEVEL II	BLUE	GUARDED
Household environment requires professional organizers or related professionals who have additional knowledge and understanding of chronic disorganization.		

LEVEL III	YELLOW	ELEVATED
Pivot point between a cluttered household environment and a potential hoarding environment. Those working with Level III household environments should have significant training in chronic disorganization and will require a community network of resources, especially mental health professionals.		

LEVEL IV	ORANGE	HIGH
Household environment requires a coordinated collaborative team of service providers in addition to professional organizers and family: mental health professionals, social workers, financial counselors, pest and animal control officers, crime scene cleaners, licensed contractors and handypersons.		

LEVEL V	RED	SEVERE
Professional organizers should not work alone in a Level V environment. Requires a collaborative team, potentially including family, mental health professionals, social workers, building manager, zoning, fire, and/or safety agents. Formal written agreements among the parties should be in place before proceeding.		



CLUTTER — HOARDING SCALE (CHS) QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

	Structure and Zoning	Animals and Pests	Household Functions	Health and Safety	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
LEVEL I	All doors, stairs and windows accessible; plumbing, electric and HVAC operational; fire and CO2 detectors installed and functional	Normal animal control (behavior/sanitation); approved number of animals; no evidence of rodents or insects	No excessive clutter; all rooms properly used; appliances functional; good housekeeping and maintenance	Safe, sanitary; no odors; medication control OK	OPTIONAL
LEVEL II	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	Evidence of inappropriate animal control; visible or odorous pet waste; visible pet fur/hair/feathers; light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects	Clutter beginning to obstruct living areas; slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs; some household appliances not functional; inconsistent housekeeping and maintenance	Diminished appropriate sanitation; odors from dirty dishes, food prep, laundry, toilets; mildew present; medication control questionable	LIGHT PPE Medical or work gloves; caps (baseball or poly bouffant); first aid kit; insect repellent; hand sanitizer
LEVEL III	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.)	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.	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	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)	MEDIUM PPE Face masks or N95 respirator masks; eye protection; gloves; disposable coveralls; poly caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit; hand sanitizer; insect repellent
LEVEL IV	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	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	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	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	FULL PPE Face masks or N95 respirator masks; safety goggles, medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves; disposable coveralls; caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit; hand sanitizer; insect repellent; headlamp or flashlight
LEVEL V	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	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.	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	Human urine and excrement present; rotting food; organic contamination; cans or jars expired, leaking or buckled; dishes and utensils buried or non-existent; 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	FULL PPE REQUIRED N95 respirator mask or mask with organic filter(s); safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex, or nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves; disposable coveralls; poly caps; work shoes/boots; first aid kit; hand sanitizer; insect repellent; headlamp or flashlight

Causes for Hoarding

Doctors indicate a number of potential causes for hoarding:

- Belief in the 'value' of a possession
- Difficulty processing information
- Emotional distress associated with 'letting go' of possessions

Impact on Individuals

Common Impacts for those with Compulsive Hoarding

- Personal feelings of embarrassment and shame
- Reduced or no social interactions
- Physical home deteriorates
- Compulsive hoarders are often in debt
- Deteriorated family relations
- Diminished quality of life

Current Treatment Options

Hoarding Disorder is now recognized by the American Psychiatric Association as a mental disorder and is included, for the first time, in their spring release.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy & Medicines

What can YOU do?

- *Be aware... step slowly*
- *Are you noticing new behaviors or behaviors that have existed for years?*
- *Reference the Institute for Challenging Disorganization/Clutter- Hoarding Scale*

www.challengingdisorganization.org

- *It takes a Team...*
Know who in your area can help... both from a mental health perspective and an organizational perspective

If you are a Hoarder, please read:

[Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring , Saving and Hoarding](#)
by David F. Tolin. This book contains a self- assessment, tips and tools.



615.599.6787

www.letsgetmoving.net