Why is hoarding an issue for the fire service?

- Hoarding is a HAZZARD for the occupants and for the Fire/EMS service. Many of the occupants have injured themselves or have died in these fires due to the high load of materials found within the home.

- Responding firefighters and EMS members can be put at risk when calls come out for these locations. Risks are obstructive exits, falling objects and excessive fire loading that can lead to collapse. Hoarding makes firefighting fires and searching for the occupants very tough.

- It's important as a department that we help our community understand why it's important to help our residents that suffer from this illness.

- By simple steps we have listed here is a great start to help support your community and your residents that need the help.

When Speaking on Hoarding think of the following:

- Hoarding has been a hidden disorder for many years. Before the early 1990's, there was little research on hoarding.

- Recent media coverage of hoarding has also increased awareness and interest among sufferers, family members, and human service personnel who often deal with the problem.

- Be respectful to the community that you're speaking to and the understandings of their well-being.

- Many who hoard call their items collections. They do not see the items as trash and they feel that the items are very special and need them to function.

- When speaking to them you should match the language that they are using. It helps by using their terms that they describe their “Collection” or “Things”. This helps you gain trust to the individual and when speaking with them they will help to begin to understand the need to clear out their clutter.

- Don't be afraid to learn how to help facilitate education and training of your members. Reach out to your communities human service personnel including mental health, social services, public health and housing officials to help your department support your community with proper education and support needs.
# The Official List of Do’s and Don’ts for Helping Hoarders

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<td><strong>Ensure the process will be private</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disclose information without asking</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Safety</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ignore the health hazards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Proper Handling of Items</strong></td>
<td><strong>Say, “Let’s get rid of all this stuff!”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>AGREE THE ITEMS ARE IMPORTANT</strong></td>
<td><strong>Throw everything in one garbage heap</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HIRE PROFESSIONALS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Take on the project alone</strong></td>
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**Communication**
- Understand the hoarder's state of mind
- Offer unconditional support

**Ensure the process will be private**
- Neighbors, friends, and other family members do not have to get involved
- Be sure whichever is helping can provide anonymity (eg. unmarked vehicles, equipment, uniforms)

**Safety**
- Highlight the safety issues first before discussing removal of items
- Assess structural damage to protect the hoarder after the project is complete
- Wear proper Personal Protective Equipment when necessary

**Proper Handling of Items**
- **Trash**
  - Biohazard materials (eg. bodily fluids, excrement, animal waste, carcasses, hazzmat) should be handled by Biohazard Specialists
  - Call local municipality with questions on disposing appliances, tires, carpeting or other large or potentially hazardous items
- **Donations**
  - Hoarders cope easier when parting with their items when they know the items can be used or appreciated by someone with greater need
  - Keep in mind: while some have excess material items, others have nothing
- **Keepsakes**
  - It is easy to forget that there are usable, valuable items amidst the mess and clutter
  - Teach about valuing collectibles and useful items

**Seek Professional Guidance**
- **HIRE PROFESSIONALS**
  - A professional hoarding cleaning service can supply all of the resources necessary for a successful hoarding cleaning project
  - Professional hoarding cleaning services offer invaluable advice and tips on organizing and sorting, preparing the hoarder for life after cleanup
  - In some instances, involving a counselor to help with the mental and emotional issues tied to hoarding is essential to the healing process
- **Take on the project alone**
  - Hoarding cleanup can be stressful. By losing one’s patience with the process will cause relapse or a disconnect in the process.
  - Hoarding cleaning can be a traumatic experience for the hoarder. Ensure a professional is present to field questions and concerns to make the process stress-free and successful