

A Resource Guide



**“WHAT TO DO WITH
ALL THAT STUFF”**

Senator Liz Krueger's
BEST PRACTICES FOR CLUTTER & HOARDING

All of us have a special relationship with things and that relationship is in some ways magical. We get carried away with those attachments and — while that could get more of us into trouble with our possessions — most of us are able to decide when an object begins to interfere with our life. We do something about it at that point. That's the thing that's so troublesome for people who hoard: when the object begins to interfere, they simply put up with it rather than deal with the item.

- Randy Frost, co-author

Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things

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Dear Community Member,

Over the past year, my office has received an unusually high volume of calls from constituents who find themselves in difficult situations because of their out-of-control, overly cluttered apartments.

Dismayed by the number of residents that are not only in danger of losing their homes, but also affecting the quality of life of their neighbors, I convened a professional roundtable. The purpose of this meeting was to bring the issue to the table and begin looking at best practices for both those who are having personal difficulty controlling the clutter in their apartments, as well as neighbors, friends, and family who are impacted by this issue.

Those who participated in the roundtable discussion included staff from other legislative offices, senior center and senior service social workers, representatives of NYC Adult Protective Services (APS), the NYC Department for the Aging, and tenant and co-op attorneys. We discovered that difficulties with hoarding are widespread throughout New York City and that there is no one clear solution to the problem. However, there are some best practices that can help ameliorate the situation for many residents in our community. This booklet is an attempt to create awareness and to offer resources for both the professionals in our community as well as the residents who are dealing with this on a daily basis.

Hoarding and unnecessarily cluttered apartments in an urban setting like New York City create unique challenges. The walls of our homes are most often shared with our neighbors. What this means is that *what we do in the privacy of our own homes frequently impacts the quality of life of those living near us*. Some of the issues that confront those living near an apartment that is overly cluttered are fire hazards, foul smells and odors, and rodent and insect infestations. Because it is a landlord or building manager's responsibility to keep all tenants safe, extensive clutter and hoarding can be grounds for eviction.

As you read through this guide, you will understand why this is not a simple problem to alleviate. Cleaning out an apartment demands physical labor, is emotionally challenging, and often costs a lot of money. Private cleaning companies can charge many thousands of dollars to clean a “hoarded-out” apartment. The constituents who call my office for help are often elderly and do not have the ability or resources to have their apartments restored to a safe and habitable condition. When there is no support network of family or friends, these tenants, co-op shareholders, and condo owners are often referred to APS. Our research has indicated that APS is the *only* government agency that can address this situation, which often results in the loss of personal items and perhaps the placement of an aide to help the person with activities of daily life; or in extreme situations, the placement of the person to a more appropriate care situation.

I would like to thank the many organizations and individuals who came together to help us start this conversation. I would also like to thank APS, JASA, the NYC Department of the Aging, and Housing Court Answers for their invaluable input.

At the conclusion of our roundtable meeting, we decided that our first step would be to educate our constituencies on the issues around extreme clutter and hoarding, the challenges that these conditions present, and some of the best practices and resources that are available to begin meeting those challenges. It is my hope that this publication will serve these purposes.

While my staff and I have done our best to ensure that the information contained in this guide is accurate and up to date, there is always more that we can learn. Please refer to the list of resources and additional reading material at the back of this booklet for further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Krueger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Liz Krueger
State Senator

About Compulsive Hoarding

Collecting is a very common form of a hobby in this country. Many collections are started when people are young children or teenagers and they grow over time.

Hoarding behavior is different from collecting behavior and can be distinguished primarily by the following:

- Excessive acquisition of items, even some that might seem to others to lack monetary or sentimental value
- Intense attachment to belongings
- Clutter that prevents living spaces from being used as they are meant to be
- Interference or distress with day-to-day activities

Increased attention to hoarding has led some researchers to look at other signs of hoarding. **Here is a list of some commonly shared experiences from people that hoard.**

- Difficult time deciding if something is valuable, useful, or meaningful
- Feeling it is impossible to get rid of any belongings or items that have been acquired
- Clutter has filled living spaces so much that they are not useable
- Worry over accidentally getting rid of something important that is mixed into a pile of things that are not useful, valuable, or necessary for the individual

- Accidentally losing important things like money, bills, prescriptions, and other significant documents within the clutter
- Difficult time turning down free items, even if they are not needed (like advertisements handed out on the sidewalk or mailed to the home)
- Persistently shops sales items to “stock up”, even if there is no money, space, or need to do so
- Not inviting visitors to the home because of worry of what they might think of the excessive clutter
- Fear of losing belongings
- Feeling emotional distress over everything that is in the living space
- Emotional pain when trying to get rid of belongings to make necessary space for repairs or for use of living space
- Refusing to let people into the home to make needed repairs
- Inability to maintain a safe and habitable space after a clean out.

For more information on why getting rid of clutter can be so physically and emotionally difficult for hoarders, please visit the OCD International website at:

<http://www.ocfoundation.org/hoarding/about.aspx>

Who struggles with hoarding?

As early as adolescence, people can begin hoarding items. The average age of an individual that is seeking some sort of help for hoarding is approximately 50 years old. People from every age cohort, from teenagers to seniors, and from all economic backgrounds have expressed personal challenges with hoarding.

A background of financial poverty is not found to increase the likelihood that someone will hoard, disputing the myth that holding onto an excessive amount of items is an effort to be frugal and prepared “just in case”. There is no one “type” of person that hoards belongings.

What kinds of items are most often hoarded?

Most people that hoard keep an excessive amount of commonly held items like paper products (these include newspaper, mail, books, flyers, and other advertisements), boxes, bags, and clothes. Less commonly hoarded items include garbage, waste, and animals.

Test Yourself

Now that you have an idea of what hoarding is like, the following are two self-administered tests to determine whether you or someone you know might have hoarding behavior.

Clutter Image Rating Scale

Since people have different opinions on what “too much” stuff looks like, a group of researchers put together this tool to help individuals “measure” clutter.

People can just pick the image that looks most like their living space. In general, a level of picture #4 or higher might indicate that there are some potential challenges for the person or people that live in the home.



Test Yourself continued...

The Hoarding Rating Scale

To take this test, please use the following scale when answering items below:

0 = No problem

2 = Mild, occasionally (less than weekly) acquires items not needed, or acquires a few unneeded items

4 = Moderate, regularly (once or twice weekly) acquires items not needed, or acquires some unneeded items

6 = Severe, frequently (several times per week) acquires items not needed, or acquires many unneeded items

8 = Extreme, very often (daily) acquires items not needed, or acquires large numbers of unneeded items

Because of the clutter or number of possessions, how difficult is it for you to use the rooms in your home?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at all Moderate Extreme Difficulty

To what extent do you have difficulty discarding (or recycling, selling, giving away) ordinary things that other people would get rid of?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at all Moderate Extreme Difficulty

To what extent do you currently have a problem with collecting free things or buying more things than you need or can use or can afford?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at all Moderate Extreme Difficulty

To what extent do you experience emotional distress because of clutter, difficulty discarding or problems with buying or acquiring things?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at all Moderate Extreme Difficulty

To what extent do you experience impairment in your life (daily routine, job/school, social activities, family activities, financial difficulties) because of clutter, difficulty discarding, or problems with buying or acquiring things?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Not at all Moderate Extreme Difficulty

SCORING: A score of 4 or greater on questions 1 and 2, *and* a score of 4 or greater on either question 4 or question 5 indicates significant hoarding.

Challenges of Hoarding

Compulsive hoarding presents many challenges, not only for the person who hoards, but for his or her neighbors, friends, and family. Some health and safety issues that arise from hoarding are listed below:

- Misplaced items, such as important documents, prescriptions, and medications
- Anxiety and depression
- Difficulty maintaining living space

In more extreme cases, the following challenges can be present:

- Falls
- Fire safety
- Insect and rodent infestations
- Dust, mold, and mildew collection
- Lack of proper repairs
- Alienation of friends and family

****Fire Hazard***

There are special areas of concern when it comes to fire safety in apartment buildings. A home filled with papers, boxes and clutter is a firetrap. Families in apartment buildings live close together, affecting each other's risks associated with fire.

****Insect and Rodent Infestations***

Clutter affords numerous harboring sites for bed bugs that can't necessarily be treated thoroughly. They may be inside accumulated clothes, magazines, books, and records—just junk in some cases. It creates environments that can't be treated where bed bugs can hide and lay their eggs, and that mice, rats and other insects find attractive.

****Dust, Mold and Mildew Collection***

As families, friends and even professional organizers assist in extreme hoarding situations, they start to smell bad odors. In urban apartments, it is often neighbors who complain about odors in the hallway or even seeping into a next door neighbor's apartment. These bad odors come from mold, mildew, rotten food, and rat and mice feces.

Dust, dust mites and accumulating dirt can cause respiratory illness and aggravate asthma. Pet dander—including that of birds—and fur shed from animals also contributes to illnesses. Infants, small children, elderly persons, and occupants with compromised immune systems are most at risk.

****Lack of Proper Repairs and Maintenance of Living Space***

Hoarders tend to avoid visitors, and they often do not allow landlords or building managers to gain entrance to their apartments. This can cause dangerous situations, not only to the tenant, but also to his or her neighbors. An example is a building-wide problem with plumbing that cannot be repaired without access to the hoarder's apartment.

**In more extreme cases, any or all of the above can lead to eviction proceedings.*

Repeating Patterns of Behavior

And still, one of the greatest challenges of hoarding is that it can be extremely difficult to treat. For some people, cleaning out the living space is only one step toward dealing with a larger issue. Because hoarding behavior is often difficult to change on one's own, ongoing treatment or support for people that struggle with hoarding can limit the chances that a home will be excessively and unsafely cluttered again.

Because many cleaned up units return to a state of unsafe clutter, funding for assistance can be difficult to secure. In an effort to achieve success in maintaining a safe home that is compliant with housing regulations, many individuals with hoarding behavior seek ongoing support or treatment to ensure they do not return to old patterns.

At the back of this booklet you will find support groups that have proved to be a great help, not only during the clean out process, but also after the home is organized. For some people, maintaining an already cleaned out space is extremely difficult. They are often being asked to change a lifetime pattern of behavior.

One-on-one counseling by a social worker or other mental health professional can also prove beneficial.

What You Can Do

If you find that you meet the criteria for hoarding or if you have trouble with clutter, the following suggestions could help you focus on the issue and make progress in making your space safe and more livable:

- Develop a plan of action that works for you—ask for help if possible in doing so.
- Try not to over-think decisions—determine immediately what to do with something (throw it away, recycle, donate, or put where it belongs).
- Work on de-cluttering for at least 15 minutes every day – set a timer if it helps!
- If you have not used an item in a year or more, try to get rid of it.
- Social workers, therapists, psychologists, and psychiatrists can help develop specialized treatment plans.
- Contact and access any of the resources listed at the end of this booklet for additional support and services.

For Families & Friends of People that Hoard

The most important thing that families and friends can do is remember that dealing with hoarding is not as easy as “just cleaning up”. Any efforts to help someone de-clutter their homes may not be well received, so it is also important to keep in mind:

- People that hoard may not be willing to accept help even if it seems like they need it.
- You cannot force someone to be motivated to de-clutter.
- Respect is important to everyone—recognize a person’s decisions and have patience with the pace.
- Understand that people have attachments that you might not have to certain types of objects.
- Develop ideas and plans for keeping the space as safe as possible. An example is moving clutter away from doors and fire exits.
- Unless Adult Protective Services or another agency is involved with a cleanout, it is best to avoid discarding any items without permission of the owner first.

Eviction Proceedings as a Result of Hoarding

In New York City, hoarding may violate the Warrant of Habitability and other city and state housing laws. The collection of items and crowded living spaces can have detrimental effects on the well-being of neighbors, as outlined under *the challenges of hoarding* in this booklet.

It is a landlord's responsibility to ensure the safety of everyone in the building. If a tenant's hoarding is posing a safety risk, the landlord is legally responsible to address the issue. This may result in an eviction proceeding. If the tenant does not comply with requests to remedy the situation.

A recent study indicated that more than 20% of individuals referred to Eviction Intervention Services (EIS) were facing eviction because of hoarding.

Housing Court - If the hoarder does not take steps to remedy the condition, a landlord can file for eviction as a holdover case. (A holdover case is an eviction case brought by a landlord to evict for a reason or reasons other than non-payment of rent.) Similar to rental unit proceedings, co-op boards can also pursue housing court action in compulsive hoarding cases.

In the City of New York, eviction proceedings on the grounds of hoarding will generally result in an *Opportunity to Cure* the situation.

Opportunity to Cure - When a landlord is evicting a tenant for violating the lease, he must issue a 10 Day Notice to Cure. This notice tells the tenant how he or she is violating the lease and the date by which the tenant must correct or “cure” the violation.

If you or someone you know is involved in eviction proceedings and needs legal information, please contact **Housing Court Answers**. Formerly known as the City-Wide Task Force on Housing Court, Housing Court Answers helps people in New York City navigate the complex world of Housing Court and NYC's tangle of housing laws and regulations.

For more information regarding housing court and eviction proceedings, visit Housing Court Answers at <http://www.cwfhc.org> or call (212) 962-4795.

Adult Protective Services
A Division of the NYC Human Resources
Administration

When adults, including the elderly and disabled, *have no support network of family or friends, and are unable to care for themselves*, Adult Protective Services (APS) may be able to provide assistance. The goal of APS is to keep clients as independent as possible while providing assistance and support where it is needed. APS is also the resource for those who present a danger to themselves as well as to others. *APS is the only government agency that will provide a free clean out for adults who are living in a “hoarded-out” home.*

APS MISSION

APS serves adults eighteen years of age and over, without regard to income, who, because of physical and/or mental impairments, are unable to manage their own resources, carry out the activities of daily living, or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, exploitation or other hazardous situations without assistance from others, and who have no one available that is willing and able to responsibly assist them .

APS ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Protective services for adults are provided to individuals 18 years of age and older, who, because of physical or mental impairments:

- are unable to meet their essential needs for food, shelter, clothing or medical care, secure entitlements due them or protect themselves from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, active, passive, or self-neglect or financial exploitation;
- are in need of protection from actual or threatened harm due to physical, sexual or emotional abuse, active passive or self-neglect of financial exploitation or by hazardous conditions caused by the action or inaction of either themselves or other individuals, and
- have no one available who is willing and able to assist them responsibly.

Referrals to APS are accepted for services only if they meet all three criteria.

For assistance or more information call 311 or the APS Central Intake Unit at (212) 630-1853.

Additional Resources

Cleanup and Organizing Companies

Some people choose to hire private cleaning companies and professional organizers to help them clear excessive clutter from the home. Information on potential for-pay services can be found here:

1. http://hoardingcleanup.com/new_york
2. <http://www.napo.net/referral/>
2. <http://www.cornellaging.org/gem/resources/cleaning.html?name1=Resources&type1=2Select&name2=Cleaning+Companies&type2=3Active>

Donations

CITY OPERA THRIFT SHOP

Call to schedule a pick-up
222 East 23rd Street, #212
(212) 684-5344

HOUSING WORKS

202 East 77th Street
(212) 366-0820

SALVATION ARMY

Call to schedule a pick-up
220 East 23rd Street
(212) 532-8115

Local Support and Recovery Groups

CLUTTERERS ANONYMOUS

For information on face-to-face and online meetings, please visit the Clutterers Anonymous website.

www.clutterersanonymous.net

EIS - Eviction Intervention Services

“SORT” support group meets the first Monday of each month from 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

1233 Second Avenue

(212) 308-2210

<http://www.eisny.org/sort.html>

HOARDERS-NO-MORE MEET-UP

A Peer-led support group

Contact: Brenna Sage

http://www.meetup.com/NYC-Hoarders-No-More-Meetup-Group/?a=mm2_l6

WEILL CORNELL

Additional resources on hoarding: Environmental

Geriatrics Program

<http://www.cornellaging.org/gem/resources/index.html?name1=Resources&type1=2Active>

Legal Assistance for Low Income Elderly and Disabled Persons

CARDOZO BET TZEDEK LEGAL SERVICES CLINIC

Housing Rights Clinic
(212) 790-0240

EVICITION INTERVENTION SERVICES (EIS)

EIS housing attorneys assist Manhattan tenants on a one-on-one basis, offering advice on particular tenant problems during their legal clinics for *Manhattan* residents. Senior legal clinics are held on Wednesdays from 2 p.m.—5 p.m. and Thursdays from 6 p.m.—8 p.m.

1233 Second Avenue
(212) 308-2210
<http://www.eisny.org>

LSNY - LEGAL SERVICES FOR NEW YORK CITY

(212) 431-7200
www.lsnyc.org

MFY LEGAL SERVICES

The Seniors Project offers a broad range of civil legal services to seniors including housing.

<http://www.mfy.org/projects/manhattan-seniors-project/>

Senior Service Providers

CARTER BURDEN

Provides heavy-duty cleaning through the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty as well as referrals for home care services and mental health providers.

1484 First Avenue
(212) 879-7400

LENOX HILL NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

Case managers provide clients with assistance in cleaning, legal help with possible evictions and mental health referrals.

331 East 70th Street
(212) 744-5022

LINCOLN SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD SENIOR SERVICES:

De-cluttering support group, facilitated by professional organizer, meets weekly on Tuesdays from 11:15 a.m.—12:15 p.m. Anyone aged 60+ is welcome to join.

250 West 65th Street
(212) 874-0860

HUDSON GUILD—FULTON CENTER

“De-cluttering with Anna-Leah”, a support group for adults aged 55+, meets weekly on Tuesdays from 10 a.m.—12 p.m.

If interested in attending, please contact Dorothy Johnson-Laird at the number below for more information.

119 9th Avenue
(212) 924-6710

Online References and Organizations:

1. <http://hoardhouse.com/>
2. www.messies.com
3. <http://www.clutterless.org/>
3. [http://www.ocfoundation.org/hoarding/
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