

## Town of Belmont

### COMPULSIVE HOARDING

Belmont Department of Health	617 993-2720
Belmont Council on Aging	617 993-2970
Belmont Youth & Family Services	617 993-2983
Belmont Police Department	617 993-2501
Belmont Fire Department	617 993-2200
Community Development	617 993-2650
Springwell Senior Services	617 926-4100
Houseworks Heavy Cleaning	617 928-1010
ServPro Cleaning	617 864-7378

### Hoarding Task Force

Representatives from Police, Fire, Health, Council on Aging and Community Development meet regularly to develop protocol to ensure collaborative interventions on hoarding cases.

### What is Compulsive Hoarding?

Compulsive hoarders acquire but have difficulty discarding items which often appear to have limited value to others. These items clutter living spaces, making it difficult to use rooms as they were intended. Hoarded items include commonly used objects such as containers, appliances, mail, books, papers, tag sale items, equipment, garbage, rotten food and less commonly, animals and human waste.

### Who is Affected by Compulsive Hoarding?

Compulsive Hoarders tend to have difficulty organizing information and making decisions. Being emotionally attached to their possessions, hoarders experience distress when attempting to discard objects. They see these objects as possessing endless useful possibilities. Compulsive hoarding typically begins with some difficulty discarding and progresses over time until it becomes unmanageable and overwhelming. Hoarding behaviors can begin in teenage years but most who hoard are older adults with an average age of onset of 50.

### Signs of Compulsive Hoarding

- Acquiring and saving behaviors
- Emotional attachment to acquired items
- Difficulty discarding and organizing items
- Difficulty with memory, decision making and categorization of possessions
- Possessions/collections cause difficulty using furniture and living spaces
- Lost items such as bills, tax forms, money, papers
- Isolated, dependent, anxious

### Dangers of Hoarding

- Rodents, insects and other unsanitary conditions
- Animal feces, decomposing animal remains

Fire Hazard: Combustible materials near stove, radiators, heating vents, electrical outlets, extension cords

Blocked exits: Emergency personnel (Fire, Police, EMT's) are not able to gain access during an emergency

Risk of Falls result from cluttered pathways throughout the home. Risk for elderly using canes and walkers.

Lack of home maintenance: Toilets, sinks can become inaccessible and unusable. Loss of heat, running water, refrigeration, working smoke detectors. Structural damage to building from increased weight and volume of clutter.

Unsanitary conditions resulting in mold, bacteria, dust, dirt can exacerbate medical conditions- asthma, headaches, allergic reactions, pulmonary conditions

Hoarding may violate State Sanitary Housing Code, with the Health Department being court ordered to remove materials and organize clutter within a specific time frame.

Court actions including eviction can lead to homelessness or hospitalizations

Impaired functioning: Poor hygiene and grooming (cluttered nonworking bath tub, sink),

Poor Nutrition (Unable to use stove, refrigerator), Inattention to medical needs,

Inadequate financial management (unable to find bills, tax receipts, forms, papers),

Difficulty sleeping (May need to sleep on floor instead of cluttered bed)

Mental Health Problems: Isolation, Anxiety, Depression, Psychosis, OCD, ADD/ADHD

#### Treatment for Hoarding

Treatment options include cognitive behavioral therapy, harm reduction and motivational interviewing aimed at improved decision making, organization and creation of a safe living space. Once a service agency is contacted a risk assessment may be performed, involving local, state and mental health agencies. Local support groups, case management services, psychotherapy, clean up services, private or subsidized home care are all available to help compulsive hoarders.

## Resources

### Books

- 1- Frost, R.O. & Steketee, g. (2010). *Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding & the Meaning of Things*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
- 2- Kolberg, J. (2006). *Conquering Chronic disorganization*. Decatur, GA: Squall Press
- 3- Nelson, M. (2008). *Stop Clutter from Stealing Your Life*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page Books.
- 4- Neziroglu, F. Burbrick, J, Yaryura-Tobin, JA & Perkins, PB (2004), *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding: Why You Save and How You Can Stop*, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publ. Inc
- 5- Tolin, DF, Frost RO, Steketee, G (2007) *Buried in Treasures: Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving & Hoarding*. NY: Oxford University Press
- 6- Tompkins, MA & Harti, TL (2009), *Digging Out: Helping Your Loved One Manage Clutter, Hoarding & Compulsive Acquiring*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publ. Inc

### Links

Department of Public Health, Department of Community Sanitation—  
[www.mass.gov/dph/dcs](http://www.mass.gov/dph/dcs)

Hoarding website by Dr Randy Frost & Dr Gail Steketee  
[www.ocfoundation.org](http://www.ocfoundation.org)

Mass Housing website related to hoarding including legal and regulatory issues  
[www.masshousing.com](http://www.masshousing.com)