

# Hoarding: some myths and truths

Source: Chief Fire Officers Association

Removing clutter and property will remove the issue of hoarding

Large scale removals without the person with hoarding behavior's permission do not work. Instead this is likely to have a long term negative impact on their mental health. The short-term, quick fix approach also does not deal with core issues. Large scale clean-ups, even with the person's permission may not work

Fires in hoarding properties will behave in the same way as they do anywhere else

Fires were contained to the room of origin in 90% 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 only takes place in certain types of property

Hoarding can be found in all property types. Hoarding in high rise premises pose very particular risks to the community and to fire fighters. Hoarding in privately owned residences creates some specific issues with regards to the application of legislation

People with hoarding issues can't see all the stuff and dirt, they don't mind it

People with hoarding behaviors can see the clutter but are able to mostly mentally block it out. This has been called clutter blindness. When a person does begin to recognize the problems, this can be a sign they are ready for change and help

There is nothing we can do about it

With the proper support, help and guidance, hoarding problems can be resolved

People with hoarding issues love their belongings more than their family

People with hoarding behaviors have a strong attachment to belongings for a range of reasons. This attachment is likely to be stronger than the average person's. The difficulty discarding is as a result of these complex issues, but does not reflect that the person's love for those in their family is lesser. Simply that it is too difficult a process for the person to deal with

People with hoarding issues are just dirty and lazy. It's a 'life-style' choice

Usually just the opposite is true. In fact, people with hoarding behaviors have often undergone a traumatic experience and/or had a huge period of instability in their lives. Incorrect interventions can often cause further trauma because the relationship with the belongings acts as a coping mechanism, discarding this haphazardly often results in re triggering of the trauma and/or escalation of the behaviors

All people with hoarding issues have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Hoarding Disorder has been classified by the American Diagnostic Statistical Manual and is published in the International Classification of Diseases. A unique classification was seen to be necessary because interventions which have succeeded in OCD were not as effective treating hoarding behaviors

People only hoard things at home

Communal areas, gardens, storage spaces, friend's/neighbor's homes and vehicles can also be used. There is legislation in place, in regard to all but storage spaces, which would mean that belongings which created unacceptable clutter could be in breach of a range of laws. Hoarding in offices and other business premises is not uncommon, and can lead to blocked escape routes and increased risk of a fire

Evicting people with hoarding issues teaches them a lesson and stops them hoarding again

Being evicted is a traumatic experience, and can create such anxiety for a person with hoarding issues that their tendency to hoard can increase. This too does not deal with the core issues. As such, it can be seen as simply shifting the problem

People with hoarding issues don't like to talk about it

There are currently support groups across the UK, although more support is needed

All people with hoarding issues live in squalid conditions or own numerous pets or both

Most people with hoarding issues do not live in unhygienic conditions, nor are they animal hoarders

Every room in a hoarder's home is packed full of stuff

People with hoarding tendencies may have part of their home which are less cluttered, or live with people who aren't hoarders and who do what they can to keep parts of a home tidy

People with hoarding tendencies are uneducated and have lower levels of intelligence

Hoarding is found within all populations

Everyone with lots of clutter is a hoarder

Just because someone owns lots of stuff or lives in a cluttered home, doesn't necessarily mean they're a hoarder