

1 What is hoarding?

Hoarding is generally characterised by an individual's tendency to hold onto items that no longer have a functional use to them. It is a behaviour that can result in the individuals living environment becoming congested and hazardous due to the volume of artefacts.

Hoarding is recognised as a mental health disorder (see DSM-5). Hoarding Disorder (HD) can coexist with other mental health conditions, such as OCD and is often associated with self-neglect. There is uncertainty around the prevalence of HD in the UK, however it is estimated that around 2% to 5% of the population experience symptoms

2 Categories of hoarding

- **Inanimate objects** (most common) – e.g. newspapers, clothes, food containers.
- **Animal hoarding** – obsessive collection of animals, often with little ability to provide the minimal standards of care.
- **Data hoarding** – hoarding or data collection equipment e.g. computers and other electronic storage devices as well as papers.

3 Hoarding disorder

Hoarding disorder is typified by persistent difficulties in discarding possessions, due to the value the individual with HD places on them;

- Sentimental value – emotional attachment
- Utility value – may be useful in the future
- Visual value – considered by the individual to be visually appealing

Hoarding is not the same as collecting, where the individual gathers the desired items in a well organised and managed manner often with the intention to proudly display to others. Individuals with HD tend to be embarrassed and do not want others to come into their home.

4 Impact on the individual

Hoarding behaviours can lead to:

- social isolation
- financial issues, and
- intrusive thoughts around possessions and
- anxiety around them being thrown away.

Without intervention hoarding behaviours will continue, with the potential of putting the individual as well as family, friends and neighbours at risk of harm.

5 Potential increased risks

- House fires;
- Infestations;
- Self-care and infestation issues;
- Tripping/falls;
- Social isolation;
- Child protection issues;
- Challenging access for emergency services;
- Tenancy agreement breaches leading to evictions;
- Anxiety, depression and stress (which, in turn, leads to increased hoarding).

7 What can we do about it?

- Raise awareness of this complex mental health condition.
- Raise awareness of how to respond and record instances of hoarding identified during home visits or via referrals.
- Consider relevance and use of legislation to help minimise risk of harm and support the wellbeing of individual:
 - Adult Support & Protection (Scotland) Act 2007
 - Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003
 - Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000
- Liaise with SFRS re Home Fire Safety Visit to provide fire safety advice specific to the risks associated with hoarding.
- Consider benefit and provision of Telecare technology linking with fire alarms, to reduce risk of injury or death as result of a fire.

6 Impact on Fire Service operations

- Difficulty in gaining access
- Difficulty in making progress
- Difficulty in locating casualty
- Difficulty in locating Gas and Electricity shut-offs
- Potential for fires being hotter
- Difficulty in applying water to seat of the fire
- Application of water can make the hoard unstable
- If water is absorbed by the hoard, this can create weight issues on an already overloaded structure.

In addition responding firefighters can be put at risk due to obstructed exits, falling objects and excessive fire loading that can lead to collapse.

