



NFPA RESOURCES

New handout on 'Hoarding: Issues for the Fire Service'

By *Lauren Backstrom*

HOARDING: *Issues for the Fire Service*

Many fire departments are experiencing serious fires, injuries, and deaths as the result of compulsive hoarding behavior. The excessive accumulation of materials in homes poses a significant threat to firefighters fighting fires and responding to other emergencies in these homes and to residents and neighbors. Often, the local fire department will be contacted to help deal with this serious issue. Since studies suggest that between three and five percent of the population are compulsive hoarders, fire departments must become familiar with this issue and how to effectively handle it.

What is hoarding?

- Collecting or keeping large amounts of various items in the home due to strong urges to save them or distress experienced when discarding them.
- Many rooms in the home are so filled with possessions that residents can no longer use the rooms as designed.
- The home is so overladen with things that everyday living is compromised.



Why do people become hoarders?

Hoarding is a mental disorder that can be genetic in nature, triggered by traumatic events, or a symptom of another disorder, such as depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, or dementia. Studies have found that hoarding usually begins in early adolescence and gets worse as a person ages. It is more common among older adults.

Why is hoarding an issue for the fire service?

- Hoarding can be a fire hazard. Many occupants die in fires in these homes. Often, blocked exits prevent escape from the home. In addition, many people who are hoarding are injured when they trip over things or when materials fall on them.
- Responding firefighters can be put at risk due to obstructed exits, falling objects, and excessive fire loading that can lead to collapse. Hoarding makes fighting fires and searching for occupants far more difficult.
- Homes living adjacent to an occupied structure can be quickly affected when a fire occurs, due to excessive smoke and fire conditions.

In some communities, officials are asking landlords and property owners to inform the local fire service or building commissioner or inspector when they become aware of a hoarding situation that poses a fire safety risk to the occupant or neighbors.

hoarding and the issues for the fire service to be aware of. The document covers what the fire service can do when they become aware of a hoarding situation, how to talk to someone regarding hoarding, and some of the risks hoarding poses for these fire service members.

[Download the free guide on hoarding through NFPA's website.](#)

If you are interested in reading more about this problem, NFPA has featured hoarding in a recent issue of [NFPA Journal](#) - [check out the story online.](#)

Lauren Backstrom is the Social Media Manager for NFPA. She recently gave a really good presentation on Social Media at Campus Fire Forum 2013 in San Antonio.

Lauren coordinates the organization's social media presence, including Twitter, LinkedIn, and the Facebook pages for NFPA and its mascot, Sparky the Fire Dog® and the Firewise Communities Program. In addition, she writes for each of NFPA's nine blogs.

Prior to her work at NFPA, Lauren worked as an account manager at Gray & Rice Public Relations, Inc., and as an account executive at Racepoint Group, where she developed strong public relations skills. She helped to drive media relations and social media programs to garner success for many leading consumer, technology and health care brands.

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Now, NFPA has published a new, free guide all about