



## THE FACTS ABOUT HOARDING

Formerly called “collectors,” psychologists now prefer the term “hoarder” to describe an individual with an emotional illness characterized by keeping a large number of companion animals (more than the typical number) who are usually in poor condition.

Many of these individuals are unable to provide even minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter and veterinary care – and the neglect often results in starvation, illness and death. Often these animals are not fixed and have not received regular veterinary care. Sometimes they are kept in small cages, or in otherwise dirty, overcrowded conditions.

They may not realize their inability to provide minimum care and may deny the impact of that failure on the animals, the household and the human occupants of the dwelling. Hoarders are generally unwilling to give up their animals – they believe the animals could never be happy or well cared for by anyone else.

If the animals are still under the control of the hoarder, and the hoarder is not cooperative in terms of getting care and finding homes for the animals, local authorities (animal control, the local humane society or SPCA, or the board of health) will need to be involved in order to get the animals away from the individual.

Hoarding cases are tough for many reasons. First, there are usually quite a few animals involved (sometimes as many as several hundred). Second, when the animals have been confiscated by animal control, they often have to be held until there is a trial. Third, the animals are often in bad shape physically, emotionally, and behaviorally, and many are not suited for adoption into homes. Additionally, the individual has legal custody of the animals until it has been determined by a local authority with law enforcement powers (usually animal control, the local humane society, or board of health) that they are truly being neglected.

### TYPES OF HOARDING

There are several different categories of hoarders, so although there can be similarities, each and every hoarding case is different.

In addition to rescue and exploiter hoarders, there's the overwhelmed caregiver hoarder, typically characterized as the kindly cat lady down the street who just can't say no to a stray in need and suddenly finds herself with more animals than she can adequately care for. According to HARC, overwhelmed caregiver hoarders have strong attachments to their animals and they understand there's a problem. They may be socially isolated and often believe their situation was caused by some change in their circumstances. They have fewer issues with authority figures and are often quite willing to have someone intervene.

But not all hoarders have good intentions.

For exploiter hoarders, it's all about them, not the well-being of the animals. These people acquire animals to serve their own needs and are indifferent to the harm they're causing them. They deny that a problem exists and reject any kind of help. They're master manipulators with an extreme need to control, and they often come across as charming and articulate. They actively acquire animals and will lie, cheat and steal without remorse to achieve their goals.

\*If you suspect a situation where someone is keeping a number of animals in less than acceptable conditions, please report it to your local animal control office.

