

## ***A Note from the Millburn Fire Department on Hoarding:***

Many fire departments are experiencing serious fires, injuries, and deaths as the result of compulsive hoarding behavior. The Millburn Fire Department is urging residents to educate themselves on the signs and symptoms of hoarding, and help to prevent future hoarding-related fire tragedies.

### **What is hoarding?**

Hoarding is defined as 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 overloaded 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?**

Hoarding can be a fire hazard. Many occupants die in fires in these homes. Often, blocked exits prevent escape from the home. People who are hoarding are subject to injury when they trip over things or when materials fall on them inside their homes. 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. Additionally, those living adjacent to an occupied structure can be quickly affected when a fire occurs, due to excessive smoke and fire conditions.

### **How can I help?**

- When talking to a person who hoards, focus on safety rather than the perceived clutter. Be empathetic and match the person's language. If they call it hoarding, then you can call it hoarding.
- Help the resident make a home safety and escape plan. Stress the importance of clear pathways and exits. Be aware that exit routes may change as new items are brought into the home.
- Install working smoke alarms in the home and test them at least once a month.
- Reach out to community resources. Talk to members of the Fire Department to alert them of your concerns. They may be able to connect you with members of a hoarding task force for additional help.

If you feel a neighbor or family member may be hoarding, the first step is to notify the Township of hoarding conditions so that we can begin helping to remove or reduce any imminent hazards, install smoke detectors and contact other family members or agencies to assist in the healing process. Township agencies including the Millburn Fire Prevention Division, Senior Services, Building and Code Enforcement, Police and EMS are willing to help in their respective capacities.

***Please call Millburn Township Fire Prevention at 973-564-7036 to report visible or suspected hoarding conditions.***

*Additional reading materials:*

[Hoarding: Issues for the Fire Service \(PDF\)](#)

[Hoarding and Fire: Reducing the Risk \(PDF\)](#)

[National Fire Protection Association Website](#)