

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND STOP ANIMAL HOARDING
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Saluki Tree of Life Alliance, <http://www.stola.org>

SIGNS OF AN ANIMAL HOARDER

- Hoarders are most often older women who live alone.
- Hoarders typically have no support network of family or friends.
- Hoarders are typically on disability, retired or unemployed.
- Up to 2000 cases of hoarding are known to occur in the U.S. each year.
- While hoarders profess their love for animals, hoarding is not about love but about control.
- Hoarding is considered a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Hoarders are mentally ill.
- Hoarders are usually in a state of complete denial; they do not see the destruction they cause.
- Hoarding is defined not by the numbers of animals, but by the way they are kept.
- Hoarders put their personal and community health at risk.
- Hoarders fail to provide even minimal standards of care or sanitation.
- Homes of hoarders are usually in such filthy condition that the premises have to be destroyed.
- Even if convicted of hoarding, hoarders are usually able to move and begin the cycle again--there is almost a 100% rate of repetition.

A COORDINATED APPROACH TO STOPPING AN ANIMAL HOARDER

1. **Identification:** First identify the problem. A person with a lot of animals is not necessarily a hoarder. If the animals are well kept, well exercised, well fed, and given adequate medical care then hoarding is not an issue. Signs of hoarding include poorly maintained animals kept in filthy conditions. Gaining access to a property to determine its condition, however, can be a big problem if the suspected hoarder does not allow visits to the home - which is usually the case.

2. **Intervention:** Contacting family or close friends and asking for their cooperation in dealing with the problem may be helpful if done in a sensitive and compassionate manner. A compassionate approach is often the most effective and should always be the first option. Hoarders are often mentally ill, aged, infirm,

and/or living on fixed incomes. While some may reject offers of help, others will gratefully accept. The main concern is ensuring that the animals get adequate care.

3. Preparation: Gather facts which will be essential if the authorities are to be contacted. If the hoarder will not permit visits inside the residence, exterior signs may give warning as to interior conditions. Warning signs of unsanitary living conditions may include:

- Obstructed exits
- Nonfunctional utilities including running water, electricity, etc.
- Inadequate light and ventilation
- Nonfunctional kitchen facilities
- Improper garbage disposal
- Obvious odors emanating from the property
- Rodent infestations
- Potential fire hazards, i.e. accumulated trash, overgrown dead foliage, etc.

4. Recruit a Team: A number of agencies and/or individuals can form a consortium to do a positive intervention including animal control, breed rescue organization, health department, veterinarian, family members or close friends of the hoarder. Veterinarians can be a tremendous help or a hindrance in hoarding cases. If you can gain the trust of the presumed hoarder's veterinarian(s) the following are warning signs which may indicate a hoarder:

- Veterinary warning signs: A constantly changing parade of pets, most seen once and not again -
- Visits for problems not usually seen in good preventive health carelike trauma or infections disease
- Rarely bringing in the same animal for diseases of old age such as cancer or heart disease
- Suspected hoarder may travel great distances to the practice, come at odd hours and use multiple vets so as not to tip them off about the number of animals
- May seek heroic and futile care for animals
- May perfume or bathe animals prior to a visit to conceal odor
- May bring in a relatively presentable animal in an attempt to get medication for more seriously ill animals at home
- May try to persuade the vet to give medication or refills without seeing the animals
- Being unwilling or unable to say how many animals they have
- May claim to have just found or rescued an animal in obviously

deplorable condition although the condition of the animal, including strong odor of urine, overgrown nails and muscle atrophy, may be more indicative of confinement in filthy conditions than of wandering the streets

- May show interest in acquiring even more animals, including checking the office bulletin board and questioning other clients in the waiting room. Be aware of this twist: hoarders may seek employment or volunteer opportunities with veterinary clinics, perhaps on a part-time basis, to have access to free or discounted medications or supplies.

5. Keep Detailed Records: Gather all evidence and facts in a detailed manner. Meticulous record keeping is essential to provide necessary evidence to obtain search warrants, serious consideration by animal control and so on. If photographic evidence is gathered, be sure to log the photographer's name, date and time the picture was taken, location of the photo, and names of witnesses. Attach this information to the back of the photo. Often complaints to authorities must be made within 72 hours of suspected animal abuse. Keep duplicate copies of all evidence.

6. Contact Authorities: This may require extreme patience and persistence. Animal control is often hampered by privacy laws and cannot intervene without hard evidence of potential abuse and/or a signed statement from a witness. It may be necessary to contact several agencies such as animal control, local health department, social services, breed rescue group, etc. to create an interactive intervention process.

7. Patience, Persistence, Determination: Never give up. The animals are depending on you. Getting justice for the animals and getting them out of an abuser's control can take weeks, months, or even years but for all the animals who are saved from a hellish existence, the effort is definitely worth it.

8. Preventing the Abuse Cycle: Even if convicted of animal abuse, hoarders are highly likely to begin hoarding again. In most cases the laws fail in not monitoring the activity of a convicted hoarder allowing them to begin the cycle of abuse all over again. The only way to prevent a hoarder from beginning again is through public awareness, education and vigilance. If you suspect that hoarding is occurring in your community don't turn a blind eye. Become a voice for the animals who cannot speak for themselves.

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