

# BEVERLY HILLS FIRE DEPARTMENT PRESENTS:



## Hoarding Awareness & Fire Risks

### 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 filled with possessions that the residents can no longer use the room as designed.
- The home is overloaded with things that everyday living is compromised.
- An estimated 3% to 5% of Americans suffer from hoarding, which was officially recognized as a disorder.



### Why Hoarding Increases Fire Risks:

- Cooking can become unsafe due to the flammable/combustible items being too close to the stove or oven.
- Fixed and portable heating units become unsafe because there are no clearances to maintain and if a portable unit tips over or is too close to a pile it can cause a fire.
- Electrical equipment / wiring can get damaged by weight of piles (generating heat). Cords get worn or can get chewed on by pests. Damaged wires can start fires.
- Open flames such as candles or smoking are very dangerous in areas where there is a lot of clutter.
- Blocked pathways and exits from piles of clutter can hinder rescue efforts or escaping from a fire.
- Adjacent occupied structures can be quickly affected when a fire occurs, due to the excessive smoke and fire conditions.
- Hoarding can also lead to slipping and tripping hazards. Another concern are health issues such as diseases caused by fecal matter and urine from rodents. (Hantavirus)



### How Hoarding Impacts First Responders:

- Hoarding puts fire responders in harms way.
- Firefighters cannot move swiftly through a home filled with clutter. It makes rescue operations more difficult.
- Responders can be trapped in a home when exits are blocked. They can get injured by objects falling or tipping over from piles.
- The weight of the stored items, especially if water is added to put out a fire, can lead to the floor weakening and floor or structure collapse.
- The fire load in the house is magnified tremendously, thus intensifying the heat, movement and growth of the fire.

### How can Hoarding be Addressed:

- When talking to a person who hoards, focus on safety rather than the clutter. Be empathetic. Match the persons language when describing items. If they call their "collection" or "things", use the same words.
- Install working smoke alarms and test them monthly.
- Help resident make a home safety and escape plan.
- Reach out to community resources, County Health Agencies. Or other available resources that specialize in hoarding situations.

