



REPORT TO: Board of Directors of Niagara Regional Housing

SUBJECT: NRH Approach to Hoarding Behaviours

RECOMMENDATION

That Niagara Regional Housing Board of Directors **RECEIVES** this report for information purposes.

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide information on hoarding in NRH communities and the NRH approach to incidences of hoarding.

BACKGROUND

Hoarding is defined as “a specific type of behaviour characterized by the acquisition of, and failure to discard, a large number of items that appear to be useless or of limited value. The living space is cluttered to such an extent that it is no longer able to function as a viable living space causing significant distress or impairment of work or social life”.¹ Individuals who hoard have strong beliefs that these items are valuable and are part of their identity. They become anxious about, and often resistant to, attempts to discard their “collections”. Appendix A provides detail on the different types of hoarding.

NRH staff are members of the Niagara Response to Hoarding Coalition (NRHC) which “acts as an advocate to ensure that individuals in Niagara who engage in hoarding behaviour have access to the services they need to maintain housing stability and a quality of life that optimizes their health and safety and that of the community”². The NRHC meets monthly to continue work on coordinated service protocols and to increase community awareness of the services available to address hoarding.

REPORT

NRH as a landlord has an obligation to work with tenants who hoard to minimize the health and safety risks that they face and to maintain their tenancy. NRH also has an obligation to all other tenants to ensure their rights to reasonable enjoyment of the premises. NRH's Community Programs Coordinators have indicated that the number of individuals who hoard has increased in recent years. There are enormous social and economic implications of

¹ “Hoarding and Diogenes Basics”, NRHC, 2013

² Niagara Response to Hoarding Coalition pamphlet, February 2010

hoarding in NRH communities. These can range from the impact of odours and increase in pests on surrounding tenants to the more serious consequences of violations of the Fire Code.

With greater recognition of Hoarding as a health issue through local television and now more formally recognized in the most recent release of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) by the American Psychiatric Association, groups such as the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association (ONPHA) are raising concerns as to the extent this may impact on our “duty to accommodate” individuals with this condition, possibly to be considered as a disability under the Human Rights Code. ONPHA in its Info on Hoarding factsheet states that undue hardship means that:

The onus is on the provider to assist the tenant, either by working independently to help the tenant to improve the condition of their unit or to connect and work with community-based and family supports. The point of undue hardship is the time at which the provider is unable to support the needs of the tenants with its current resources (staff, financial, etc.)

Hoarding Protocol

Recognizing that hoarding is a long-term and on-going process which very often requires regular involvement and can have severe consequences if not addressed quickly and effectively, NRH established a Hoarding Protocol (Appendix A). The protocol is based on the recommendations of the NRHC and uses a clutter classification continuum to establish the level of the hoarding problem (level 1= small amount of clutter vs. level 9= extreme hoarding) to guide Staff response.

NRH staff’s role is to identify units with hoarding behaviours, connect the tenants with supports to correct the issue and monitor the unit to ensure that the hoarding does not resurface (or is addressed quickly if it does). In the event that the hoarding has become a fire hazard and/or negatively impacts other tenants and the tenant with the hoarding behaviour refuses to cooperate, staff may consider eviction as a last resort. Just issuing an eviction notice to a tenant sometimes results in behavioural change and prompts the tenant to accept supports.

Hoarding in NRH communities is now being tracked in NRH’s Yardi system. NRH also reports hoarding cases to the NRHC through the Crisis Outreach and Support Team (COAST) in order to ensure that regional statistics reflect the current extent of the problem in our community and the effectiveness of the local response protocols. If funding is available and demographics indicate higher concentrations of hoarding, enhanced community supports may be offered through the NRHC. The NRHC has also established a list of appropriate cleaning companies³, which are currently coordinated and monitored by Community Support Services Niagara (CSSN). Tracking of hoarding cases and costs is critical to determine effectiveness of current approaches and for future funding requests.

As always, NRH will need to continue to review each case where there is a risk of eviction for its programmatic and legal obligations to support and accommodate individuals who have

³ CSSN vets and categorizes the cleaning companies in order to match them with the client (ex. professional organizing, appropriate for large items/fast cleanups, one-on-one etc.)

significant social and health needs, balanced against its obligations to provide safe housing for all of its tenants.

CONCLUSION

The NRH Hoarding Protocol together with NRH's relationship with community agencies and membership on the NRHC, is important to the protection of NRH tenants and assets. With early detection of hoarding behaviours, staff have the ability to assist the tenant and avoid the expensive and dangerous consequences of major hoarding situations. As NRH and the NRHC continue to study and track hoarding incidences, better strategies and understanding of costs and legal obligations will likely emerge.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY LORA BECKWITH AND SHIRLEY CORDINER

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Chair

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Hoarding Protocol And Guide for NRH Staff

BACKGROUND

There are four types of hoarding:

1. Generalized hoarding - collection of anything (no preference for the type of possession collected)
2. Specialized hoarding - collection of specific things
3. Diogenes Syndrome (severe self-neglect) - most common among the elderly; unable to maintain basic sanitation and hygiene, and as a result, they come to live in a state of squalor; characterized by extreme personal neglect, domestic squalor (living in extreme amounts of waste or filth), hoarding, lack of shame/concern about living conditions, social withdrawal, and refusal of help.
4. Animal hoarding - the accumulation of a large number of animals and failure to provide adequate nutrition, sanitation, and veterinary care, as well as failure to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals or environment

WHEN IS INTERVENTION NECESSARY?

Intervention is necessary when:

- There are threats to physical health and safety within the home, including:
 - Hazards (ex. Fire, blocked egress etc.)
 - Falling hazards
 - Structural collapse
 - Unsanitary conditions

Only when clutter takes over most living spaces, prevents the individual from using the living spaces as intended, and causes distress or impairment, can it be considered hoarding. More information is available from the Niagara Response to Hoarding Coalition online. *Staff has access to a website address which is not being made public at this time.*

WHAT INDICATES A THREAT WARRANTING INTERVENTION?

The Clutter Image Rating (CIR) provides images to classify the level of the hoarding problem (level 1= small amount of clutter vs. level 9= extreme hoarding). **See Clutter Image Rating.**

The following are guidelines for NRH Staff response to possible hoarding:

Clutter Image Rating (CIR) Response

Level of Clutter	PA Role	CPC Role
Levels 1 to 3	None	None
Levels 4 to 6 (MINOR)	Property Administrator (PA) advises Community Programs Coordinator (CPC). CPC advises PA if they discover hoarding first	CPC discusses support services and/or contacts next of kin for assistance CPC follows up with support
Levels 7 to 9 (MAJOR)	PA advises CPC (or CPC advises PA if they discover it first) PA considers notification of enforcement agencies PA considers issuing Notice to Evict PA follows up as required Hoarding must be documented in Yardi according to clutter level in either "Memo" or "Inspection" Field	CPC discusses process to avoid eviction with tenant CPC advises COAST (to track and provide crisis support) and activates support services If there is a mental health issue, CPC supports agency worker and discusses timelines for cleaning with tenant. There are 3 agencies for case management services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Niagara Region Community Mental Health Program b. Canadian Mental Health Association Niagara c. Niagara Region Seniors Community Programs Supporting Independent Living (SIL) CPC monitors progress CPC follows up regularly to ensure continued compliance with agreed-upon plan All contact must be documented in Yardi, as well as tracking of initial identification and clutter level in "Memo" Field

NRH Staff do not participate in cleaning of hoarding units, but can offer cleaning suggestions and refer to Community Support Services Niagara (905-682-3800), who have a list of local cleaning services that have been screened and categorized. CPCs will make referral to cleaning companies and, if necessary, the service will bill NRH; NRH may opt to arrange for a tenant payment plan (minimum \$50/month; maximum \$100/month)

The main enforcement agencies that may be contacted if hoarding has become health and safety risk and tenant is refusing to cooperate are:

1. Fire prevention
2. Property standards/by-law
3. Public health
4. Humane society
5. Family and Children's Services (*immediate notification)

Each enforcement agency follows specific legislation. The Fire Code allows the greatest power of entry out of all enforcement agencies. Health inspectors, by-law officers, SPCA agents, and police must gain permission from the individual or court before entering a home.

WHAT IF THE TENANT WILL NOT COOPERATE?

- Help from health and social service providers must be accepted voluntarily
- Help from support services can be refused and dismissed at any time
- Forced clean-up is the last resort because it does not typically resolve the core problem and can cause severe emotional distress
- If efforts have failed and the hoarding behaviour continues, eviction may be pursued under the Residential Tenancies Act

Talking to Tenants about Hoarding:

- Be clear about the dangers of hoarding behaviour and acknowledge that changing behaviour can be difficult, frustrating, and time consuming
- Avoid judgment because many individuals who hoard do not perceive their homes as dirty
- Be **persistent** and as **sensitive** to their needs as possible
- Be aware that some tenants may only respond to authority figures such as fire, police, or enforcement agency

Clutter Image Rating

1 to 3 = NONE

4 to 6 = Minor

7 to 9 = Major



3



6



9



2



5



8



1



4



7

