

CLUTTER-HOARDING SCALE[®]

a residential observational tool

FIVE LEVELS. FIVE CATEGORIES.



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CHALLENGING
DISORGANIZATION[®]

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This document is to be used as an assessment/guideline tool only. The Institute for Challenging Disorganization is not responsible for any work performed by a professional organizer or other related professional when using the Clutter–Hoarding Scale®.

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SCOPE OF THE SCALE

For Use in Residential Observational Assessments

The Institute for Challenging Disorganization (ICD) developed the *Clutter–Hoarding Scale*® (C–HS®) to serve as an observational guideline tool for the assessment of residential environments, and is intended for the assessment of the household environment only.

- The C–HS® was created specifically for use in the assessment of a home’s interior, except where the outside structure affects the overall safety of the interior.
- The C–HS® is not intended for the assessment of sheds, unattached garages or outbuildings.
- The C–HS® is not to be used for diagnostic purposes or for any psychological evaluation of a person or persons.
- ICD is not responsible for any work performed by a professional organizer, related professional, or any other person when using the C–HS®.

For Use as a Guideline Tool by Professional Organizers, Related Professionals and Collaborating Team Members

The C-HS® provides definitive assessment parameters relating to health and safety issues, and presents a potential range of environments in which professional organizers, related professionals and others might choose to work.

ICD acknowledges and defines the following categories of support providers that the C-HS® may serve:

Professional Organizers

Professional organizers are those who receive remuneration for organizing services, maintain professional standards and ethics defined by association affiliations, and continually educate themselves in the organizing field and/or specialty areas.

Related Professionals

Related professionals are those whose professional relationships with individuals specifically target issues of challenging disorganization. Related professionals include, but are not limited to psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians, nurses, health department professionals, social workers, educators, researchers, municipal planners and code enforcers, and ADD/ADHD coaches.

Collaborating Team Members

Collaborating team members may include any combination of professional organizers, related professionals, therapists, coaches, family members and community service agencies. All those whose professional or personal relationships with an individual involve them in the process of creating and maintaining environmental change in the home are considered collaborating team members.



ICD is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. ICD's mission is to provide education, research, and strategies to benefit people challenged by chronic disorganization.

PARAMETERS OF THE SCALE

Five Levels

ICD has established five levels to indicate the degree of household clutter and/or hoarding from the perspective of a professional organizer or related professional.

The levels in the scale are progressive, with Level I as the lowest and Level V the highest. ICD considers Level III to be the pivot point between a household that might be assessed as cluttered and a household assessment that may require the deeper considerations of working in a hoarding environment.

LEVEL	COLOR	LEVEL OF CLUTTER-HOARDING
I	GREEN	LOW
II	BLUE	GUARDED
III	YELLOW	ELEVATED
IV	ORANGE	HIGH
V	RED	SEVERE

Five Assessment Categories

Within each level are five specific categories that describe the degree of clutter and/or hoarding potential.

1. Structure and Zoning

Assessment of access to entrances and exits; function of plumbing, electrical, HVAC (any aspect of heating, ventilation or air conditioning) systems and appliances; and structural integrity

2. Animals and Pests

Assessment of animal care and control; compliance with local animal regulations; assessment for evidence of infestations of pests (rodents, insects or other vermin)

3. Household Functions

Assessment of safety, functionality and accessibility of rooms for intended purposes

4. Health and Safety

Assessment of sanitation levels in household; household management of medications for prescribed (Rx) and/or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs

5. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Recommendations for PPE (face masks, gloves, eye shields or clothing that protect wearer from environmental health and safety hazards); additional supplies as appropriate to observational level

LEVEL I

GREEN

LOW

Household environment is considered standard. No special knowledge in working with the chronically disorganized is necessary.

Structure and Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All doors, stairways and windows accessible • All plumbing, electrical, HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems fully functional • Installed and functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors
Animals and Pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate animal control (behavior and sanitation) • Number of animals in compliance with zoning regulations • No evidence of non-pet rodents or insects
Household Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No excessive clutter • All rooms being used for intended purposes • All household appliances fully functional • Consistent routine housekeeping and maintenance
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and maintained sanitation conditions • No odors (animal, food or natural gas) • Medications: quantity within normal limits; appropriately stored, current dates and child-proof lids as indicated
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPE Optional • First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight and insect repellent

LEVEL II

BLUE

GUARDED

Household environment requires professional organizers or related professionals who have additional knowledge and understanding of chronic disorganization.

Structure and Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One major exit blocked • One major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate) • Some plumbing or electrical systems not fully functional • Nonexistent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors
Animals and Pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animals: evidence of inappropriate animal control (behavior and sanitation) • Visible or odorous pet waste • Visible pet fur/hair/feathers • Light to medium evidence of common household pests/insects
Household Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clutter obstructs some functions of key living areas • Slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs • Some household appliances not fully functional • Inconsistent routine housekeeping and maintenance
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions • Odors related to dirty dishes, food preparation surfaces, laundry, toilets; mildew in bathroom or kitchen • Medications: quantities questionable; expired, current Rx and OTC commingled; haphazard storage; pills not in Rx containers
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light PPE: as needed and suggested • Medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves and heavy-duty leather or cloth work gloves with reinforced palms • Caps (such as baseball) or disposable polyester bouffant caps • Disposable shoe covers • First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight and insect repellent

LEVEL III

YELLOW

ELEVATED

ICD considers Level III to be the pivot point between a household environment that can be assessed as cluttered and a household assessment that may require the deeper considerations of working in a hoarding environment. Professional organizers, related professionals or others who are working with Level III household environments should have significant training in chronic disorganization and have developed a helpful community network of resources, especially mental health professionals.

Structure and Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outside clutter of items normally stored indoors • HVAC devices not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate) • Nonexistent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors • One part of home exhibits light structural damage (having occurred in preceding six months)
Animals and Pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal population exceeds local legal regulations • Evidence of inappropriate animal control • Inadequate sanitation (fish tank stagnant, reptile aquarium not well maintained, animal odor and waste, bird droppings) • Audible evidence of pests; medium level of spider webs in house • Light insect infestation (bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)
Household Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clutter obstructing functions of key living areas • Clutter exists around exits, entrances, hallways and stairs • At least one room not being used for intended purpose, e.g., items stored in shower; limited bed access or space • Several appliances not fully functional • Inappropriate usage of electric appliances and extension cords • Substandard housekeeping and maintenance • One or two obvious hazardous materials in small quantities, such as chemical spills, broken glass, etc.
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions (food preparation surfaces heavily soiled, dirty dishes, dirty toilets, visible mildew in bathroom or kitchen) • Odors obvious and irritating • Garbage cans not in use, full or overflowing • Presence of accumulated dust, dirt and debris • Dirty laundry scattered throughout the house • Medications: Rx and OTC easily accessible to people and pets; presence of expired Rx medications
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium PPE • Face masks: surgical mask or healthcare particulate respirator mask • Eye protection and gloves: eyeglasses, safety goggles, medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; work gloves with reinforced palms • Disposable coveralls, polyester bouffant caps, work shoes/boots • First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight and insect repellent

LEVEL IV

ORANGE

HIGH

Household environment requires a coordinated collaborative team of service providers in addition to professional organizers and family. Such providers might include mental health professionals, social workers, financial counselors, pest and animal control officers, crime scene cleaners, licensed contractors and handypersons. Mental health and/or medical and financial issues are frequently involved.

<p>Structure and Zoning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive outdoor clutter of items normally stored indoors • HVAC devices not working for longer than one year • Nonexistent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors • Structural damage to home existing longer than six months • Water damaged floors, damaged walls and foundations, broken windows, doors or plumbing • Odor or evidence of sewer backup
<p>Animals and Pests</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal population exceeds local ordinances • Evidence of poor animal sanitation; destructive behavior • Excessive spiders and webs • Bats, squirrels, rodents in attic or basement (audible and visible) • Medium insect infestation (bedbugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)
<p>Household Functions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diminished use of and accessibility to key living areas • Several rooms cluttered to extent they cannot be used for intended purposes, e.g., items stored in shower; limited bed access or space • Clutter inhibits access to exits, entrances, hallways and stairs • Inappropriate storage of hazardous/combustible materials, e.g., gasoline, leaking paint or chemicals • Appliances used inappropriately, e.g., refrigerator being used for storing non-food items • Improper use of electric space heaters, fans or extension cords
<p>Health and Safety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotting food, organic contamination • Expired, leaking or buckling cans and/or jars • Dishes and utensils unusable • No linens on beds; sleeping on mattress, chair or floor; infestation of bedding and/or furniture • Mold and/or mildew obvious; visible moisture or standing water • Medications: Rx and OTC easily accessible to people and pets; presence of expired Rx medications
<p>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full PPE • Face masks: surgical mask, healthcare particulate respirator mask, or respirator with organic filter(s) • Safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; heavy duty work gloves • Disposable coveralls, caps, and shoe covers; work shoes/boots • First aid kit, hand sanitizer, headlamp/flashlight and insect repellent

LEVEL V

RED

SEVERE

Household environment will require intervention from a wide range of professionals. Professional organizers should not work alone in a Level V environment. A collaborative team of related professionals needs to be assembled to create and implement clearly defined goals and negotiated timetables. Members might include family, mental health professionals, social workers, building manager, zoning, fire, and/or safety agents. The individual with a Level V home might be involved in legal proceedings, such as a conservatorship, guardianship, divorce, custody, eviction or condemnation proceedings. Formal written agreements among the parties should be in place before proceeding.

Structure and Zoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery • Inadequate or nonexistent ventilation; HVAC systems not working • Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors • Water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors or plumbing • Unreliable electrical, water, and/or sewer septic systems; odor or evidence of sewer backup • Irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure • Nonexistent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors
Animals and Pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior, health and numbers • Pervasive spiders, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc. • Heavy insect infestation (bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)
Household Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key living spaces not usable • All rooms not used for intended purposes • Exits, entrances, hallways and stairs blocked • Toilets, sinks and tubs not functioning • Hazardous conditions obscured by clutter • Appliances unusable • Hazardous and primitive use of kerosene, lanterns, candles, fireplace/woodstove as primary source of heat and/or light
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human urine and excrement present • Rotting food; organic contamination; expired, leaking or buckled cans and/or jars • Dishes and utensils buried or nonexistent • Beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation • Pervasive mold and/or mildew; moisture or standing water • Medications: Rx and OTC easily accessible to people and pets; presence of expired Rx medications
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full PPE required • Face masks: healthcare particulate respirator mask or respirator with organic filter(s) • Safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; heavy duty gloves • Disposable coveralls, caps and shoe covers; work shoes/boots • First aid kit, hand sanitizer, headlamp/flashlight and insect repellent



SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Animal Hoarding

Dr. Gary Patronek, founder of The Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC) (Public Health, 1999), defines animal hoarding as:

- “Having more than the typical number of companion animals
- Failing to provide even minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, shelter, and veterinary care, with this neglect often resulting in illness and death from starvation, spread of infectious disease, and untreated injury or medical condition
- Denial of the inability to provide this minimum care and the impact of that failure on the animals, the household, and human occupants of the dwelling
- Persistence, despite this failure, in accumulating and controlling animals”

The costs of animal hoarding intervention can be significant due to requirements for veterinary services, animal housing, litigation, and/or clean up or demolition. Euthanasia is often only option for many animals due to ill health, contagious disease and the large numbers of animals being hoarded. The significant and permanent deterioration of a home’s sanitary condition can result in building condemnation.

Intervention of animal hoarding falls within multiple jurisdictions including any of the following state and local government agencies: mental health, public health, aging, child welfare, zoning, building safety, animal control, sanitation, and fish and wildlife. Professional organizers are cautioned that working with animal hoarding cases will likely involve exposure to complicated and hazardous work environments and requires advanced training with a team approach intervention.

Severe Domestic Squalor

Severe domestic squalor (SDS) is a term used to describe homes whose interior conditions have become unsanitary to the point of being a threat to the health and safety of those who live or work in them. Assessment of severe domestic squalor may include the following:

- Accumulated filth and dirt (potentially including animal or human feces)
- Rotting food
- Infestations of rodents and insects
- Months or years of accumulated trash
- Decaying wood
- Few signs of repair efforts
- Broken or non-functioning facilities inside or outside the home

The natural decomposition process of the squalid environmental conditions contributes to dangerous development of surface and airborne molds, or other bacteria-laden sludge-like substances in the home.

SDS can be found in all types of housing situations, including very upscale homes and neighborhoods. SDS often involves hoarding; however, hoarding does not always involve squalor. It is dangerous and can be potentially life threatening. SDS is often associated with a lack of social contact and mental or physical incapacity.

The client living with SDS might be involved in legal proceedings, such as a conservatorship, guardianship, divorce, custody, eviction, or condemnation proceedings. In addition to professional organizers, clients living with SDS require the help of other professionals or community agencies. Reporting of concerns to appropriate community agencies is highly recommended for professional organizers and is legally mandated for many related professions.

Proper Disposal of Prescription Drugs

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends the following:

- Do not flush prescription drugs down toilet or drain unless specifically instructed to do so by the label or attached information sheet. Improperly flushed medications have been found to contribute to excessive ground-water contamination.
- Safe disposal of prescription drugs may be accomplished through community drug take-back programs or household hazardous waste collection.
- If a drug take-back program is not available, the FDA recommends the following:
 1. Remove prescription drugs from original containers
 2. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance – used cat litter or coffee grounds
 3. Put mixture into sealed bag or container
 4. Conceal identifying information from empty container (name and Rx number) with black permanent marker pen
 5. Place mixture in sealed container
 6. Dispose empty drug container into trash

(Partial excerpts from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, October 2009)

ADDITIONAL ICD RESOURCES

The ICD website contains additional resources on subject matter related to the C-HS® and to challenges with disorganization. These include publications and fact sheets on such topics as hoarding, the elderly, time management, AD/HD, mental health issues, medical health issues, family dynamics, grief, goal setting and more.

Free Fact Sheets

Are You Chronically Disorganized? (Fact Sheet 001)

Are You Situationally Disorganized? (Fact Sheet 002)

Conditions Commonly Associated with Disorganization (Fact Sheet 004)

Tips For Communicating With The Chronically Disorganized (Fact Sheet 007)

Collaborative Therapy for Clutter Management (Fact Sheet 011)

Suggested Publications

Reading & Resource List for Professionals Working with Chronically Disorganized People

Heirs of the Chronically Disorganized (Publication 005)

Introduction to Compulsive Hoarding (Publication 024)

Working with the Elderly (Publication 009)

Body Double Work (Publication 014)

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