




Community Initiatives for the Prevention of and Response to Animal Hoarding




Sunday March 1st, 2015
Orlando, FL






What Is Animal Hoarding?

- When someone accumulates a large number of animals
- Fails to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, veterinary care
- Fails to act when animals or environment begin to deteriorate
- Fails to recognize the negative impact on their own health.
- The “paralysis” of “analysis” and their behavior leads to social isolation.



What Animal Hoarding is Not

- Feral cat caretakers (usually)
- Breeders/ Puppy Mills
- Over the limit pet owners
- Animal exhibitors
- Legitimate animal rescue groups/shelters or sanctuaries



Animal hoarding is often not taken seriously



“Crazy Cat Lady Action Figure” (2004)



Animal hoarding is often not taken seriously





“Crazy Cat Lady” Board Game (2010)



How to Conduct Criminal Investigations of Hoarding

- First off, know who you’re dealing with
 - utilize online databases (property appraiser, tax collector)
 - search departmental case files and databases
 - reach out to electric, phone, and cable service providers to aid in establishing the identity of a resident
 - utilize the expertise of law enforcement and their access to criminal databases





How to Conduct Criminal Investigations of Hoarding

- Find out as much information about the potential suspect as possible before responding to the residence.
- Never underestimate the amount of information a mail carrier or garbage collector can tell you about a particular address.
- Talk with neighbors, they can prove to be credible witnesses if the case is tried in court
- Is the suspect registered as a business or a 501C3?
- Has anyone in the community adopted/purchased unhealthy animals from the suspect?

Communication is Key

- Work Towards Compliance First
- Utilize Enforcement Last (unless egregious conditions are already present)
- Try to build trust and avoid being perceived as authoritarian
- Remember, probable cause rarely exists solely from the exterior of the home. Therefore, entry into the home is key. This can either be achieved voluntarily or through a search and seizure warrant.

Intervention & type of hoarder

	General approach / outcome		
Type of hoarder	Persuasion with verbal agreement	Possibility of future legal action	Prosecution
Overwhelmed caregiver	Most likely to be receptive to help and downsizing	May be sufficient to reduce likelihood of recidivism	Often unnecessary and may be counterproductive
Rescuer hoarder	Unlikely to be effective, at least in the initial stages	Motivation is to continue with rescue efforts, so potential for a down-scaled operation important	May be required if hoarder fails to adhere to agreed upon plan for animal care
Exploiter hoarder	Likely to treat recommendations & offers of help with contempt	Unlikely to be intimidated and may welcome adversarial approach	Probably only viable option

From: Animal Hoarding: Structuring interdisciplinary responses to help people, animals, and communities at risk. Patronek, Loar, Nathanson, eds. 2006

Patronek G. 2010 Adapted from FAWC, 2009

Entry Into The Residence

Voluntarily

- Should be captured in writing
- Consent for entry can be withdrawn at any time
- Allows for an immediate assessment of the situation
- Builds more solid probable cause for the issuance of a search and seizure warrant when suspects withdraw consent
- Requires less time
- Builds repore with the suspect, should animals not be in immediate danger and require seizure
- Allows the investigator to begin conversations about programs and services available to the hoarder

Search and Seizure Warrant

- Requires probable cause that a crime has been committed
- Difficult to obtain with the limited information present from the exterior of the residence
- Immediately shuts down the lines of communication with the suspect
- Time consuming and expends a great deal of resources
- Necessary to build a solid criminal case
- Allows for a thorough search to locate items of evidence pertaining to the crime and the seizure of abused animals

Plan Ahead

- Always include a veterinarian as part of your investigation
Many states exempt veterinarians from civil liability for their role in aiding an investigation into animal cruelty.

In Florida:

§ 828.12 (4) A veterinarian licensed to practice in the state shall be held harmless from either criminal or civil liability for any decisions made or services rendered under the provisions of this section. Such a veterinarian is, therefore, under this subsection, immune from a lawsuit for his or her part in an investigation of cruelty to animals.

- Anticipate what resources you may need, even if they aren't readily available in your community.
-Forensic Testing – Necropsy, DNA, Trace

Seizing of Animals

- If animals are seized during the course of the investigation, follow these simple steps to ensure accurate documentation.
 - photograph all animals at all angles before entry into the shelter
 - get accurate weights before providing food and water
 - have your veterinarian gather blood and feces for testing before anything is given to the animal
 - document the animal's progress over the next several weeks to show improvement
 - begin the petition for custody at the time of impound – ensure you have a great relationship with your county attorney / DA so that they can get the ball rolling. (Refer to Florida State Statute 828.073)



Classic Approaches Don't Work

- Classic approaches to animal hoarding are ineffective at resolving the problem.
- For years, agencies have attempted to:
 - Ignore the problem
 - Wait until the problem becomes a crime before getting involved
 - Allow the hoarder to merely surrender animals to avoid prosecution
 - Place all of the responsibility for the case into the hands of animal control
 - Address the initial problem without follow-up visits



So What Does Work?

- Some agencies have been employing new and innovative ways to approach the problem
- Some of the most successful resolutions to the problem involve a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach.
- As we now know, animal hoarding is a dysfunctional behavior that has just as much to do with Mental Health as it does Animal Control.
- In order to achieve resolution in these cases, agencies must work together within their respective fields of expertise.



Multi-Agency, Multi Disciplinary Approach

- Let's look at a real life example of how implementing this approach can be successful.



has been experimenting with this idea since 2010.

- After several unsuccessful attempts by their Animal Services Department to get assistance with these types of cases, an extreme hoarding case occurred that changed it all.
- The idea was simple, let's try and bring agencies from across the county together under one roof and triage these types of cases.
- Once the lines of communication were opened, an amazing thing happened. The community rallied in support.



An Example of What One Community Did to Resolve the Problem

- Because their animal services department recognized that the hoarding of objects and the hoarding of animals have many similarities, they chose to take part in all hoarding cases involving animals.
- The reason for this was the fact that most hoarding cases, whether object or animal hoarding, involve animals. The environment created from the hoarding of objects is a form of neglect (or even cruelty) if animals are present.



How It All Started



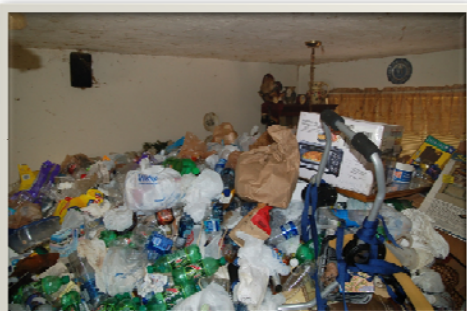
- One Saturday afternoon in late July 2009, a citizen walked into Lee County Domestic Animal Services and asked to speak with a member of management.
- The citizen, a woman in her mid sixty's, was noticeably upset over the seizure of her two dogs the day before. She seemed very ashamed, even referring to herself as a "pig"



The Exterior



The Interior



The Interior



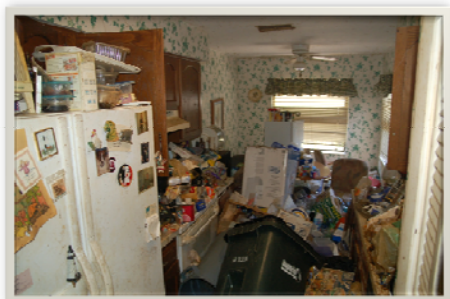
This Is Where She Spent the Majority of Her Time



Hidden Dangers



The Kitchen



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Challenges Faced



- After seeing that, ask yourself "Now what am I supposed to do."
- The hoarder desperately wanted her two dogs back. There were no programs or services in place to help.
- The home was unsafe for the animals as well as the hoarder.
- Would this be considered animal cruelty in your jurisdiction?
- Who would you call for help?
- Where do you start?

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It Was Difficult in the Beginning

- Calls were placed to every governmental and non-profit human welfare agency. The overwhelming response that Animal Services received from its requests for assistance was:
 - “We don’t handle that”
 - “It’s a code enforcement problem”
 - “It’s an animal control problem”
 - “It’s a social services problem”
- It was like the game hot potato. No one wanted to accept liability or step outside their comfort zone.

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Someone Stepped Up To the Plate

- After several unsuccessful attempts to gain support from other agencies, the county’s Department for Human Services agreed to sit down and brainstorm with Animal Services.
- A glimmer of hope appeared when the Director of Human Services offered a possible solution. It was a Federal Grant Program aimed at rehabilitating homes for the needy.



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What Happened Next?

- Several criteria needed to be met before the funds were available. Because this was a grant, the Government restricts how and in what circumstances the funds can be used.
 - The citizen must own their home free and clear
 - The citizen must qualify based on their income
 - A non repayment lean is placed on the property to prevent the funds from being used to flip homes for profit.

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It Was the Spark for Change

- The grant was approved and renovations began on the home. During this time
 - The hoarder began psychological counseling
 - She moved into a hotel that was paid for using her own funds.
 - She attended mental health support group meetings every week.
 - She had to attend her court date for the citations she was issued by the responding officer.
 - She maintained contact with Animal Services throughout the process.

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In Her Own Words...



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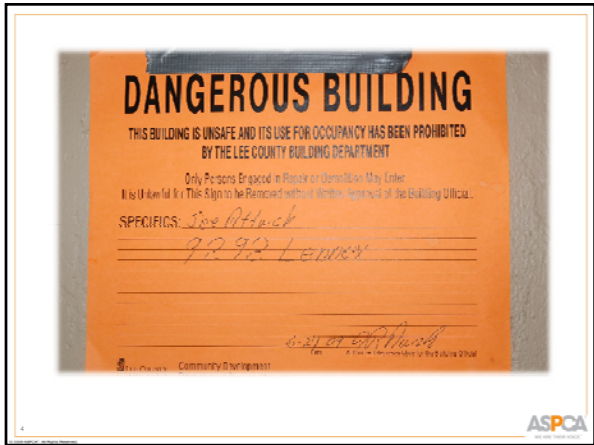
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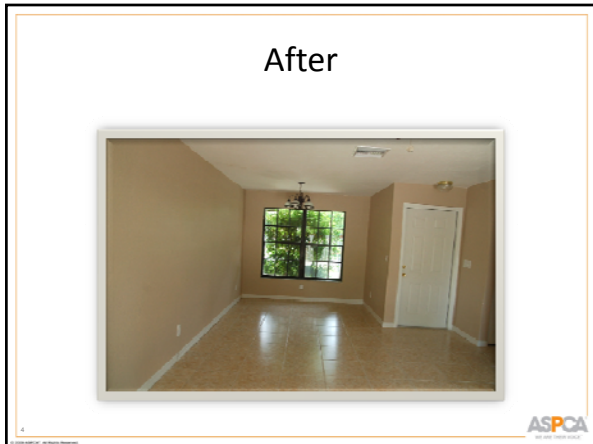
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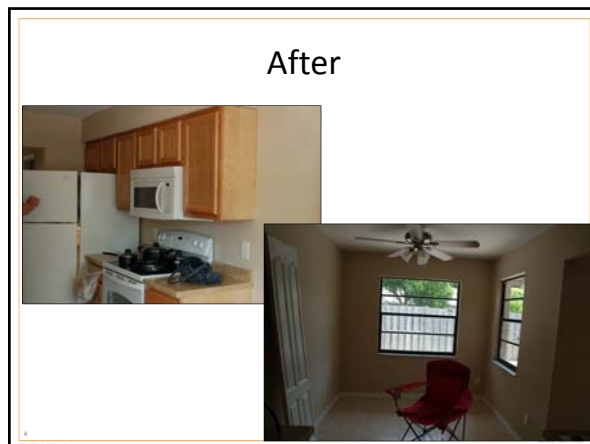
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One Year Later...





Using This Case as a Model

- Animal Services was finally able to get the attention of surrounding agencies to help in these cases.
- The Lee County Taskforce on Hoarding was created.
- Monthly meetings are held, even to this date, at the department of Human Services. This venue allows for the collaboration of multiple agencies to address the hoarding problem in the community.
- Local media outlets clamored at the chance to showcase such a proactive group in the community.
- The formation of the Taskforce, and its daily functions, are at no additional cost to tax payers. This is because its members function within their existing roles in the community.

How Do New Cases Get Reported?

- United Way's 211 information line acts as a first point of contact for the public.
- They refer cases relating to animals directly to Animal Services.
- They refer object hoarding cases to the taskforce at monthly meetings.

How Do Cases Get Handled Within this Taskforce

- If the case is animal related, Animal Services functions as the lead agency.
- If the case is strictly object hoarding, the responsibility is shared among different agencies depending on the complexity of the case.
- Updates on new and existing cases are provided at monthly meetings.
- The rehabilitated hoarder in the aforementioned case is an active member of the taskforce. She regularly attends monthly meetings and is receiving training on how to lead a new support group for hoarders.

What Resources Are Available in Your Community?

- The US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- The USDHUD has a pool of funding referred to as Community Block Grant Funds
- Your Parish's Housing and Human Services or Human Services Department is the recipient of annual funding for the rehabilitation of homes in the communities they serve.

Where to Go for Contacts in Your Area

- <http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/local/offices>
- This website lists the contact persons within the state that receive grant funding through USHUD and their contact information
- These funds are income qualifying grants. The recipient must make less than 80% of the area median income to qualify for the funds.
- The recipient must own the property out right and owe no back taxes



Additional Grant Information

- The funds must be offered by the jurisdiction to the recipient.
- Jurisdictions have to submit a plan for how the funds will be allocated each year. They must also come up with a 5 year budgetary spending plan.
- In some cases, the grant is paid in the form of a non repayment loan against the property.
- Lastly, there may be additional grant funding offered through the state.



Additional Reference Material

- Hoarding of Animal Research Consortium- Tufts University
-There are numerous publications available through their website located at <http://www.tufts.edu/vet/hoarding/>

I have included: "Structuring interdisciplinary responses to help people, animals, and communities at risk" on your thumb drives for reference.



"Hoarding Disorder" now recognized as a distinct mental disorder in the 2013 edition of the DSM



These are just a few of the agencies represented by Lee County's Taskforce on Hoarding.





WE ARE THEIR VOICE.™

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