



TRAINING REPS



Fire Incidents Involving Hoarding Conditions

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Hoarding is when someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner. The large quantity of “stuff” covers the living areas of the home, causing significant distress or impairment. This condition can make normal fireground operations such as hose-line advancement, search & rescue, and overhaul very difficult - if not impossible.

Scene Size-Up

When arriving to the scene of a structure fire there may or may not be an indicator that hoarding conditions could be present inside the occupancy. We may have knowledge of these hazards from previous EMS calls for service. We should ensure we pass on this information at shift change. When conducting your size-up, take note of any red flags on the exterior such as:



- Storage around the outside the property almost appearing as if it has spilled out of the property into the yard and/or deck.
- Vehicles in the driveway or out front that may be full of contents. Chances are the inside of the home will match. Look for tarps around the outside of the property covering up objects; these are valued possessions to the occupant and they may take steps to protect them from weather.

Initial Incident Commander Concerns

Upon finding that hoarding conditions exist in an occupancy the Incident Commander should consider:

- Requesting additional resources ***immediately*** and place a tactical pause on operations before committing crews to an offensive fire attack. (This would even be for an incipient stage fire due to the extra manpower that will be required to complete most normal tasks.)
- Address immediate safety issues:
 - First, most fires that contain hoarding conditions will be oxygen limited and heighten the potential for a backdraft.
 - Second, the condition of the primary structural elements should be considered due to overloading. Signs of collapse may be difficult to detect given the inability to visualize sagging, holes, and other structural issues.
 - Third, and most importantly, is the need for the incident commander to locate the seat of the fire prior to committing crews to an offensive fire attack.
 - The Incident Commander should consider ordering a transitional fire attack to get water on the fire quicker.

Desire ★ *Determination* ★ *Dedication*

Operational Concerns

Hoarding conditions will present significant challenges on tactical operations:

- The very basic task of moving an attack line through the structure will prove to be difficult. Moving within the pathways established by the occupant, members should be aware of the potential for contents to collapse onto them – covering handlines and further complicating efforts to remain oriented.
- A primary search oriented to a wall will be challenging, since the search crew may not be able to reach the wall from the pathways. The pathways and “voids” within the structure will also be where victims will be found. The VEIS approach should be considered. Keep in mind that isolating a room may prove difficult due to contents blocking doorways.
- Establishing multiple RIT Teams should be considered due to the amount of manpower that would be needed to remove a downed firefighter. RIT members should consider using a sked or the reaves as sled to help keep the down firefighter on top of the debris piles.
- Overhauling a home that contains hoarding conditions will be very difficult and require a different approach. Locate the room of origin and if a window is present, convert the window into a doorway allowing the debris to be pulled directly outside instead of going through the home. Consider the integrity of the structure prior to hydraulic overhaul.

Fighting fires in structures with hoarding conditions present unique challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed by both the I.C. and operating crews. Routine, aggressive tactics are ineffective and proven to increase the likelihood of firefighter injuries and fatalities.

[Safety Bulletin 21-01: Incidents Involving Hoarder Homes](#)

LODD Deaths involving Hoarding Conditions:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/pdfs/face201414.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fire/reports/face201803.html>

