

What is hoarding?

The New American Webster's Dictionary defines the verb to **hoard** as "to store up beyond one's own needs." Collecting can be a harmless activity, which is emotionally and spiritually rewarding.

So what is the problem?

Excessive hoarding may jeopardize your housing. Your neighbors will likely learn about it, and complain to the landlord or to city authorities. This could result in an eviction notice from your landlord if you are a tenant or an order from the city authorizing the building department to "Vacate or Demolish" your home. If you are a senior and this happens to you, the city may also appoint a conservator to manage your finances and decide where you will live.

What does the law say?

If you are a tenant and your hoarding is related to a physical or mental disability, you may be able to stop an eviction and get extra time to clean up your home or apartment.

If the City wants you out of your home, the problem must be so severe as to be a health and safety risk. A technical violation of building and zoning laws will not be enough if there is no real health or safety risk.

The law gives certain guidelines. For example, in the City of San Mateo,

- There must be a three-foot wide walking space in hallways and rooms.
- Things stacked near the ceiling can be no closer than one foot from the ceiling. (e.g. newspapers, magazines, clothing)
- Emergency exits must be clear (no blocked doors or windows).
- No piles of leaves, lumber, grass clippings, or other organic materials. These things attract rodents and insects.
- The amount of garbage and recyclables stored is limited to the maximum the city will pick up each week.

What causes hoarding?

Hoarding may be a sign of:

- Obsessive – Compulsive Disorder
- Head Traumas
- Paranoid Schizophrenia
- Mental Retardation
- Organic Mental Disorders
- Pervasive Developmental Disorders
- Life experiences of deprivation
- A Physical Disability
- Depression

What can I do to save my housing?

Get some help. Contact agencies that can provide support:

Medical and/or In-Home Care Support

Santa Clara Valley Health & Hospital System – Central Mental Health
(408) 885-6220

Alliance for Community Care
(408) 261-7135 x282

San Francisco Bay Center for Cognitive Therapy
(510) 652-4455

Mental Health Association of San Mateo County
(650) 368-3345

Legal Representation

Bay Area Legal Aid
(650) 358-0745

Mental Health Advocacy Project
(408) 294-9730

Legal Assistance to Elderly
(415) 801-4444

If your housing is at risk and you feel this brochure has not answered all of your questions, CALL (650) 358-0745 for a phone appointment.



IS YOUR
HOARDING
JEOPARDIZING
YOUR HOUSING?



For help, call

**BAY AREA
LEGAL AID**

(650) 358-0745

OR TOLL FREE (800) 551-5554

Bay Area Legal Aid
San Mateo County Office
2287 So. El Camino Real
San Mateo, California, 94403
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