CLUTTER – HOARDING SCALE©

a residential observational tool

FIVE LEVELS. FIVE CATEGORIES.

ALL-NEW CHS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE ALSO AVAILABLE!
visit www.challengingdisorganization.org for more information
Copyright © 2011
Published by the Institute for Challenging Disorganization
1693 S. Hanley Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63144
www.challengingdisorganization.org
Publication Number 016

Copyright © 2003, 2011 The Institute for Challenging Disorganization (ICD) (formerly the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization), St. Louis, MO, U.S.A. The ICD grants permission to copy, reprint, and transmit all or parts of the Clutter – Hoarding Scale (“CHS”) for educational, not-for-profit purposes, provided credit is given to the ICD. Requests for permission to quote, copy, reproduce, or redistribute all or parts of the CHS for commercial purposes should be submitted in writing to www.challengingdisorganization.org

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 ICD Clutter – Hoarding Scale.

ICD gratefully acknowledges the writers of the 2011 revised edition: Kristin Bergfeld, Sheila Delson, CPO-CD®, Randi B. Lyman, CPO-CD®, Lynn Mino, CPO-CD® and Heidi Schulz, CPO-CD®; and the original writers, Sheila Delson, Cindy Glovinsky, Terry Prince and Heidi Schulz.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

4

## SCOPE OF THE SCALE

For Use in Residential Observational Assessments 4

For Use as a Guideline Tool by Professional Organizers, Related Professionals and Collaborating Team Members 5

## PARAMETERS OF THE SCALE

The Five Levels of the ICD Clutter - Hoarding Scale 6

The Five Assessment Categories In Each Level 7

## LEVELS OF THE SCALE

Level I - Green – Low 8

Level II - Blue – Guarded 9

Level II - Yellow – Elevated 10

Level IV – Orange – High 11

Level V – Red – Severe 12

## SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Animal Hoarding 13

Severe Domestic Squalor 14

Disposal of Prescription Drugs 15

## ADDITIONAL ICD RESOURCES

Free Fact Sheets 16

Suggested Publications 16
THE ICD CLUTTER – HOARDING SCALE
a residential observational tool

SCOPE OF THE SCALE

For Use in Residential Observational Assessments

The Institute for Challenging Disorganization (ICD) developed the *ICD Clutter – Hoarding Scale* (CHS) 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 CHS 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 CHS is not intended for the assessment of sheds, unattached garages or outbuildings.

- It is not to be used for diagnostic purposes or for any psychological evaluation of a person or persons.

- The ICD is not responsible for any work performed by a professional organizer, related professional, or any other person when using the CHS.
The CHS 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.

The ICD acknowledges and defines the following categories of support providers that the CHS 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.
**PARAMETERS OF THE SCALE**

- **Five Levels**

The 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. The 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>COLOR</th>
<th>LEVEL OF CLUTTER – HOARDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>GREEN</td>
<td>LOW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>BLUE</td>
<td>GUARDED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td>ELEVATED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>ORANGE</td>
<td>HIGH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>RED</td>
<td>SEVERE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Household environment is considered standard. No special knowledge in working with the chronically disorganized is necessary.

| **Structure and Zoning** | 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** | Appropriate animal control (behavior and sanitation)  
| | Number of animals in compliance with zoning regulations  
| | No evidence of non-pet rodents or insects |

| **Household Functions** | No excessive clutter  
| | All rooms being used for intended purposes  
| | All household appliances fully functional  
| | Consistent routine housekeeping and maintenance |

| **Health and Safety** | 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)** | PPE Optional  
| | First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight and insect repellent |
Household environment requires professional organizers or related professionals who have additional knowledge and understanding of chronic disorganization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure and Zoning</th>
<th>Household Functions</th>
<th>Health and Safety</th>
<th>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• One major exit blocked</td>
<td>• Clutter obstructs some functions of key living areas</td>
<td>• Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions</td>
<td>• Light PPE: as needed and suggested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One major appliance or HVAC device not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate)</td>
<td>• Slight congestion of exits, entrances, hallways and stairs</td>
<td>• Odors related to dirty dishes, food preparation surfaces, laundry, toilets; mildew in bathroom or kitchen</td>
<td>• Medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves and heavy-duty leather or cloth work gloves with reinforced palms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some plumbing or electrical systems not fully functional</td>
<td>• Some household appliances not fully functional</td>
<td>• Medications: quantities questionable; expired, current Rx and OTC commingled; haphazard storage; pills not in Rx containers</td>
<td>• Caps (such as baseball) or disposable polyester bouffant caps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Nonexistent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors</td>
<td>• Inconsistent routine housekeeping and maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Disposable shoe covers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions</td>
<td>• First aid kit, hand sanitizer, flashlight and insect repellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 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** | • 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** | • 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** | • 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** | • 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)** | • 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 |
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.

| Structure and Zoning | • 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  |

| Animals and Pests | • 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.)  |

| Household Functions | • 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  |

| Health and Safety | • 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  |

| Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) | • 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  |
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Structure and Zoning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Animals and Pests</strong></th>
<th><strong>Household Functions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Health and Safety</strong></th>
<th><strong>Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery</td>
<td>Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior, health and numbers</td>
<td>Key living spaces not usable</td>
<td>Human urine and excrement present</td>
<td>Full PPE required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate or nonexistent ventilation; HVAC systems not working</td>
<td>Pervasive spiders, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc.</td>
<td>All rooms not used for intended purposes</td>
<td>Rotting food; organic contamination; expired, leaking or buckled cans and/or jars</td>
<td>Face masks: healthcare particulate respirator mask or respirator with organic filter(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors</td>
<td>Heavy insect infestation (bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)</td>
<td>Exits, entrances, hallways and stairs blocked</td>
<td>Dishes and utensils buried or nonexistent</td>
<td>Safety goggles; medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves; heavy duty gloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water damaged floors, walls and foundation; broken windows, doors or plumbing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Toilets, sinks and tubs not functioning</td>
<td>Beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation</td>
<td>Disposable coveralls, caps and shoe covers; work shoes/boots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreliable electrical, water, and/or sewer septic systems; odor or evidence of sewer backup</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hazardous conditions obscured by clutter</td>
<td>Pervasive mold and/or mildew; moisture or standing water</td>
<td>First aid kit, hand sanitizer, headlamp/flashlight and insect repellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appliances unusable</td>
<td>Medications: Rx and OTC easily accessible to people and pets; presence of expired Rx medications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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)
The ICD website contains additional resources on subject matter related to the CHS 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)

Please visit [http://www.challengingdisorganization.org](http://www.challengingdisorganization.org) for more information.