Clutter–Hoarding Scale®

A Residential Observational Tool

To Assess the Volume of Clutter and Environmental Risks

FIVE LEVELS | FIVE CATEGORIES

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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 an organizing professional, related professional, or individual when using the Clutter–Hoarding Scale®.

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DEIB Statement

ICD® strives to create a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all and aspires to promote equity. ICD® acknowledges that people from diverse backgrounds worldwide read our publications and hear and watch our media content. Thank you for helping us make ICD® a place where everyone feels supported and valued.

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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®) as an observational guideline tool for assessing solely the residential environments. The scale focuses exclusively on environmental severity and functional impact, independent of psychiatric diagnosis. It is designed to support both non-clinical and clinical professionals in assessing safety, sanitation, and usability in residential settings.

The C–HS® assesses various types of dwellings. It focuses on the condition of the interior space and its functionality. This tool is not meant for clinical diagnosis or to evaluate an individual's behavior or tendencies. The five scale levels measure different amounts of clutter, ranging from spaces with minimal clutter (Level I - green) to spaces with extreme clutter (Level V - red).

- 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.
- Any kind of dwelling can be assessed with the C–HS®
- The C–HS® is not intended to assess outbuildings used for storage.
- The C–HS® is not for diagnostic purposes or psychological evaluations of individuals. The scale only assesses the volume of clutter and environmental risks.
- ICD® is not responsible for any work performed by an organizing professional, related professional, or any other person when using the C–HS®.
- The C–HS® helps to evaluate the degree of clutter in a dwelling, from Level I as the lowest, where the quantity of clutter is minimal, and Level V as the highest, where the clutter is extreme.

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

The C–HS® provides definitive assessment parameters regarding health and safety issues and presents a potential range of environments where organizing professionals, related professionals, and individuals might choose to work.

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

Organizing Professionals

Organizing professionals 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 first responders, physical and mental health professionals, legal professionals, municipality disciplines, educators, researchers, and coaches.

Collaborating Team Members

Collaborating team members may include any combination of organizing professionals, related professionals, therapists, coaches, family members, friends 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.

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ICD® is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) educational organization. ICD® mission is to provide education, research, and strategies to benefit people challenged by chronic disorganization and the professionals who work with them.

PARAMETERS OF THE SCALE

Five Levels of ICD® C–HS®

The C–HS® has five levels. Level I is the lowest on the scale, where the quantity of clutter is minimal; Level V is the highest, where the clutter is extreme. The C–HS® considers that Level III is the pivot point between a household that might be cluttered and a household assessment that may require deeper consideration when working in a hoarded 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 impacting the household functionality.

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**
   Wildlife, Pets, and Pests
   Assessment of animal care and pet 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 the household; air quality and odors; household management of any kind of medication

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 with little or no clutter. Special knowledge is always required when working with individuals affected by chronic disorganization and organizing challenges.

Structure and Zoning	☐ All doors, stairways and windows accessible ☐ All plumbing, electrical, HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) systems fully functional ☐ Fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors installed and functional
Animals Wildlife, Pets 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 are used for intended purposes ☐ All household appliances fully functional ☐ Consistent routine housekeeping and maintenance
Health and Safety	☐ Safe and maintained sanitation conditions ☐ Good air quality; no odors, animal or food waste, or natural propane/gas ☐ Medication: 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

LEVEL II	BLUE	GUARDED

Household environment with evidence of clutter. Specific knowledge is always required when working with individuals affected by chronic disorganization and organizing challenges.

Structure and Zoning	☐ 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 ☐ Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors
Animals Wildlife, Pets and Pests	☐ 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	☐ Clutter obstructing 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	☐ Evidence of non-maintained sanitation conditions ☐ Moderate air quality, odors related to dirty dishes, food preparation surfaces, laundry, toilets, sewer, or natural/propane gas. ☐ Mildew in bathroom or kitchen ☐ Medication accessible to others and pets; presence of some expired medication
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	☐ Light PPE: as needed and suggested ☐ Medical or industrial grade latex or nitrile gloves ☐ Caps (such as baseball) or disposable 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 hoarded environment. Organizing professionals, related professionals or other individuals who are working with Level III household environments should have advanced knowledge in chronic disorganization and have developed a network of resources, especially mental health professionals.

Structure and Zoning	☐ Visible outdoor clutter, minimal garden/backyard maintenance, overflow of recycling materials, furniture, building materials, etc. ☐ HVAC devices not working for longer than one season (regionally appropriate) ☐ Non-existent or non-functional fire and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors ☐ Sections of the home with light structural damage (having occurred in preceding six months)
Animals Wildlife, Pets 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 the 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) ☐ Unhealthy air quality, odors obvious and irritating. Possible natural/propane gas leakage ☐ Garbage cans not in use, full or overflowing ☐ Presence of accumulated dust, dirt and debris ☐ Dirty laundry scattered throughout the house ☐ Medication easily accessible to others and pets; presence of expired medication
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	☐ Medium PPE ☐ Face masks: surgical mask or particulate respirator mask ☐ Eye protection and gloves: eyeglasses, safety goggles, medical/industrial grade latex/nitrile gloves ☐ Disposable coveralls, 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 because health, financial, legal, and social issues are frequently involved. Providers might include organizing professionals, health professionals, social workers, legal and financial professionals, pest and animal control officers, biohazard cleaners, licensed contractors. Advanced knowledge in hoarding behavior and coexisting conditions is required.

Structure and Zoning	☐ Excessive outdoor clutter, random broken items, untended garden/backyard, piled recycling materials, large pieces of, building materials, etc. ☐ HVAC devices not working for longer than one year ☐ Non-existent 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 Wildlife, Pets 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 preventing intended purposes, e.g., items stored in the 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., fridge 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 ☐ Very unhealthy air quality. Obvious mold/mildew; visible moisture or standing water ☐ Medication inappropriately stored and scattered in different places, easily accessible to others and pets; presence of expired medication
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	☐ Full PPE ☐ Face masks: particulate respirator mask, or respirator with organic filter(s) ☐ Safety goggles; medical/industrial grade latex/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 and formal written agreements among the parties should be in place before proceeding. The individual living in Level V conditions might be involved in legal proceedings, such as a conservatorship, guardianship, divorce, custody, eviction or condemnation proceedings. Health, financial, legal, and complex social issues are common. The team of related professionals needs to be assembled to create and implement clearly defined goals and negotiated timetables. Providers might include organizing professionals, health professionals, social workers, legal and financial professionals, pest and animal control officers, biohazard cleaners, licensed contractors, building management, zoning, fire, and/or safety agencies. The most advanced knowledge and access to resources for hoarding behavior and coexisting conditions is required.

Structure and Zoning	☐ Extreme indoor/outdoor clutter; foliage overgrowth; abandoned machinery; large quantity of recycling materials, large pieces of furniture, building materials, etc. ☐ Inadequate or non-existent 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, no running water, broken sewer/septic systems; sewer backup ☐ Irreparable damage to exterior and interior structure
Animals Wildlife, Pets and Pests	☐ Animals at risk and dangerous to people due to behavior, health and numbers ☐ Pervasive spiders, mice, rats, squirrels, raccoons, bats, snakes, etc., depending on the region. ☐ Heavy insect infestation (bed bugs, lice, fleas, cockroaches, ants, silverfish, etc.)
Household Functions	☐ 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	☐ Human urine and excrement present ☐ Rotting food; organic contamination; expired, leaking or buckled cans and/or jars ☐ Dishes and utensils buried or non-existent ☐ Beds inaccessible or unusable due to clutter or infestation ☐ Pervasive mold/mildew; moisture or standing water ☐ Hazardous air quality, intolerable odors ☐ Medication: current and expired medication commingled; haphazard storage; pills not in containers
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	☐ Full PPE required ☐ Face masks: particulate respirator mask or respirator with organic filter(s) ☐ Safety goggles; medical/industrial grade latex/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

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Animal Hoarding

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

HARC's seminal 2006 manual, *Animal Hoarding: Structuring Interdisciplinary Responses to Help People, Animals, and Communities at Risk,*

- *"Having more than the typical number of companion animals*
- *Failing to provide minimal standards of sanitation, space, nutrition, and veterinary care for the 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 the only option for many animals due to ill health, contagious diseases, and the large number 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. Organizing professionals are cautioned that working with animal hoarding cases will likely involve exposure to complicated and hazardous work environments and require 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
- A few signs of repair efforts
- Broken or non-functioning facilities inside or outside the home

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

SDS can occur in various housing situations, including upscale homes and neighborhoods. While SDS often involves hoarding, hoarding does not always lead to squalor. It poses dangers that can be life-threatening. Additionally, SDS is frequently linked to a lack of social contact and mental or physical incapacity.

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

Disposal of Prescription Drugs

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

- Do not flush prescription drugs down the 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 groundwater 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. Take your prescription drugs out of their original containers.
2. Mix drugs with an undesirable substance, such as cat litter or used coffee grounds.
3. Put the mixture into a disposable container with a lid, such as an empty margarine tub, or into a sealable bag.
4. Conceal or remove any personal information, including Rx number, on the empty contai ners by covering it with a black permanent marker, duct tape, or by scratching it off.
5. Place the sealed container with the mixture and the empty drug containers in the trash.

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

Always consult relevant and up-to-date regulations regarding drugs and medicines in your state, province, or country.

ADDITIONAL ICD® RESOURCES

The ICD® website offers additional resources on topics related to the C–HS® and challenges associated with disorganization.

Please visit challengingdisorganization.org for more information.

Resources

- CLASSES
  - On hoarding tendencies and chronic disorganization for related professionals.
- FACT SHEETS
  - Topics include hoarding, aging, time management, ADHD, mental health issues, medical health issues, family dynamics, grief, goal setting, and more.
- FIND A PROFESSIONAL
  - Online directory to help you locate ICD®-educated organizing professionals

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