

9 Tips for Dealing with Hoarding Situations

1. If you are about to take on a hoarding situation – find out who is going to pay you and how much they can afford. All too many contents contractors have found out too late that no one is willing to take responsibility for the final bill (and the occupant may not have the mental or financial ability to do so).
2. If you can, get the occupant to stay with a friend or relative – if you don't, you may have a lot of emotions to deal with as you clear away their "treasures." And make sure you have a contract giving you permission to dispose of the detritus you clear away (it may not be enough, but it is a step in the right direction).
3. Contents managers should check all the rooms before sending in their teams. Just because one room is not contaminated, doesn't mean the one right next to it is safe.
4. Use air scrubbers, use well-fitted masks with top notch filters, use protective gloves and clothing. Don't go into a contaminated hoarding house without them!
5. Check pockets, envelopes, shoes, rollup blinds, etc. for real hidden treasures – hoarding pros find cash and other valuables in unexpected places. We know of teams who have uncovered precious gemstones, religious medals, artwork and even a piano!
6. Divide the detritus into piles of "discard," "save," "donate," "restore" etc. – if you just toss everything and it turns out that you threw away property deeds, bills, birth certificates etc., you may find yourself liable on all sorts of unpleasant levels – no matter what sort of agreement you have.
7. Always protect your skin and your breathing. Some hoarding houses are not as bad as others, but none of them are clean. When you find a bad one you may not even know it until you pull up a pile of newspapers to discover a dead animal. Let this be your rule of thumb – the more hazardous things appear; the more layers of personal protection are required.
8. If the house is contaminated with rat droppings, dead animals, rotting food etc., use a good cleaner/disinfectant – disinfectants are notorious for not working when used in a filthy environment...you will need cleaners. Then come back with a good disinfectant – you can get Hantavirus just from breathing in the dust from swept rat droppings.
9. If you end up in a hazardous situation, dispose of your PPE with great care – you may not be contaminated yet, but your equipment is.

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