

Recognizing and Responding to Rescue Hoarders

Randall Lockwood, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President
Forensic Sciences and Anti-Cruelty Projects
ASPCA
randall@aspca.org
Phone: 571 225-3463



© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved

Defining “Animal Hoarder”

“Someone who accumulates a large number of animals;

Fails to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation and veterinary care;

And fails to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals (including disease, starvation and even death) or the environment (severe overcrowding, extremely unsanitary conditions) or the negative effect of the collection on their own health and well-being and on that of other household members.”

Dr. Gary Patronek in Public Health Reports (114), 1999



2

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Animal's Farm Home, Ellenville, NY 1987 – one of the first “Rescue Hoarder” operations with over 1000 animals kept by Justin McCarthy, dubbed “Dr. Doolittle of the Catskills” in a Reader’s Digest profile.

Demographics of “Animal Hoarders”

- Majority (over 2/3) are women
- Majority (about 2/3) are unmarried
- Most begin hoarding in their 30’s
- Generally well-educated, with some college
- All income levels are represented

4

© 2011 ASPCA. All Rights Reserved.

ASPCA
WE ARE THEIR VOICE

Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

1. Preoccupation with Their Animals

- Animals take up most of their time
- Animals take up most of their money
- Little contact with others not involved in maintaining the animals

5

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

2. Presence of Enablers Who Help Perpetuate the Problem

- Relatives
- Staff and/or volunteers
- Public officials
- Other shelters or animal agencies
- Society at large

6

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

3. Neglect of Personal, Physical, and Environmental Conditions

- Neglect of personal health and hygiene
- Neglect of animal health and hygiene
- Presence of masses of other accumulated items, e.g. bottles, newspapers, debris
- General decay and disrepair of household

7

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

4. Claims of Persecution

- Local animal control or humane society is seen as the enemy
- Little or no attempt to adopt or otherwise place animals
- Assistance from outside groups usually unwanted or futile
- Legal assistance is often rejected

8

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

5. Denial and Alibis for Behavior

- Serious health problems are minimized
- Environmental problems are minimized
- Dead animals are ignored or treated as if alive
- Short-term excuses are given for long-term problems
- Many hoarders think of themselves as “rescuers”

9

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.



Characteristics of Animal Hoarders

6. Repetition or Cycling of Addictive Behavior

- Without supervision ... VIRTUALLY ALL hoarders resume their activities
- Without ties to the community, many hoarders leave the area and begin again elsewhere
- Lifelong monitoring is ESSENTIAL

10

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.



Psychology of Hoarding



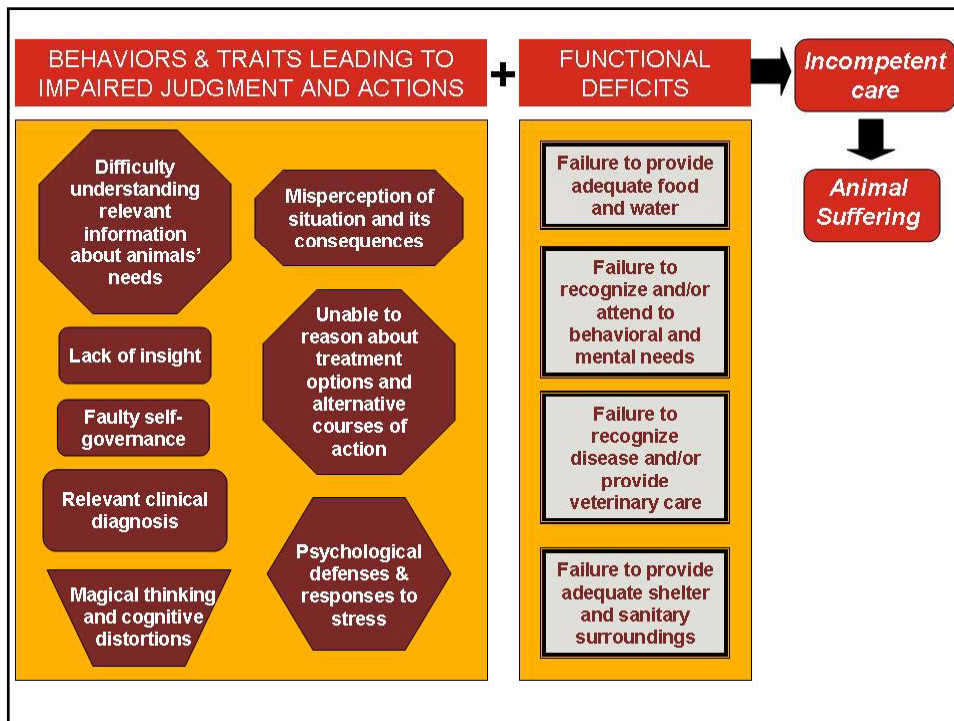
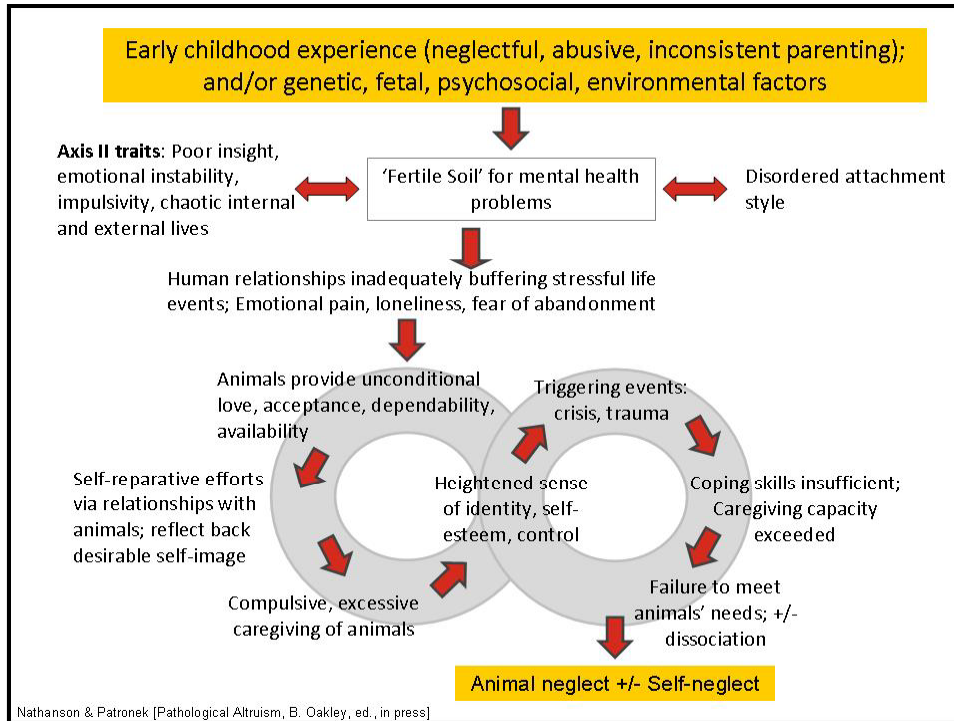
© 2011 ASPCA. All Rights Reserved.

What makes
someone become
an animal
hoarder?



12

© 2011 ASPCA. All Rights Reserved.



General Types of Animal Hoarders

- Overwhelmed Caregivers
- Exploiter Hoarders
- Incipient Hoarder
- Breeder-Hoarder
- Rescue Hoarders

Overlap may exist and hoarders may show characteristics of different types at different times

15

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Overwhelmed Caregivers

- Some awareness of the problems
- Problem triggered by change in circumstance – health, finance
- Strong attachment to animals as family
- Population acquired passively
- Does not deny problems, but minimizes them
- Less secretive, more likely to comply with agencies
- May involve psychological disorders

16

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Exploiter Hoarder

- Acquires animals for own psychological needs
- Tends to have true sociopathic or personality disorders
- Little empathy for people or harm to animals
- In extreme denial of situation
- Rejects any outsider's authority; believes his/her knowledge and ability is superior
- Manipulative, cunning, lies, cheats, steals to achieve ends
- Actively plans to evade laws

17

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Rescue Hoarders

- Sense of mission to save produces unavoidable compulsion
- Fear of death of self and animals, opposes euthanasia
- Animals acquired actively, sometimes surreptitiously
- Believes he/she has unique ability to care – little or no adoption
- Avoids authorities/impedes access, litigious!!
- Usually has network of enablers

18

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved

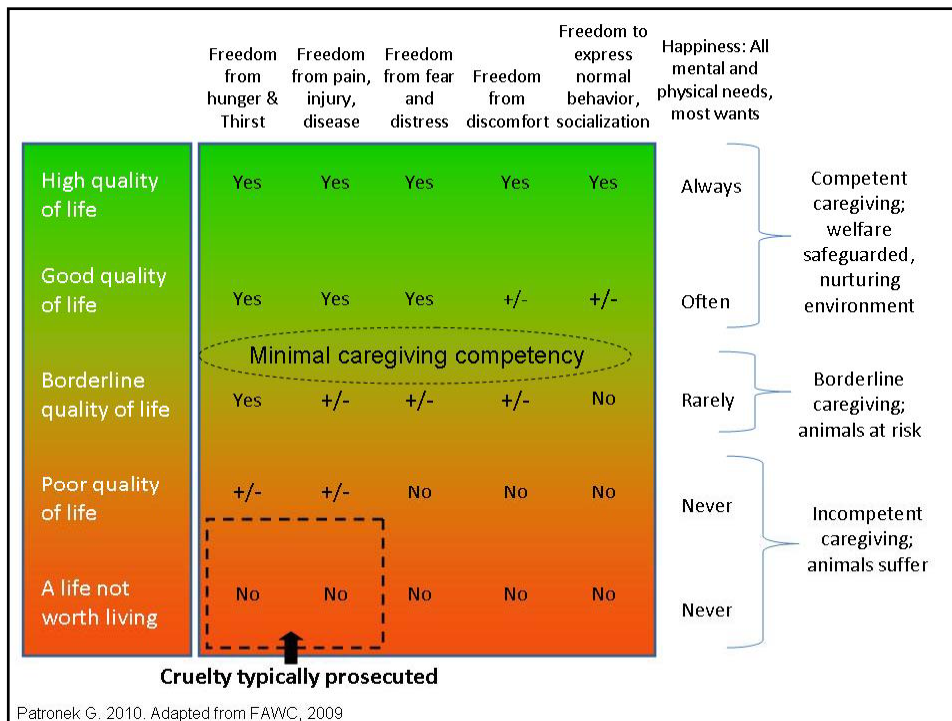


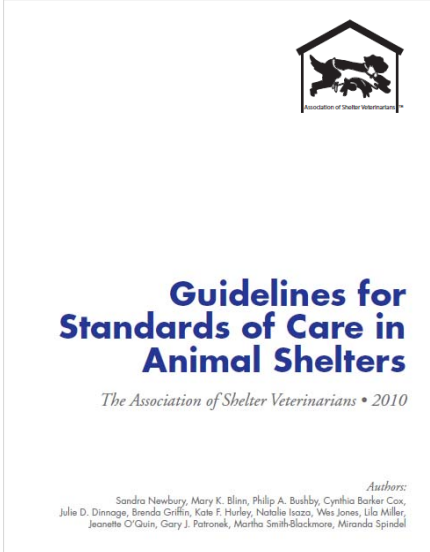
Legitimate Rescue Groups vs. Rescue Hoarders

	RESCUE GROUP	RESCUE HOADER
Numbers	Known, manageable	Often unknown, overwhelmed
Intake	Limited, selective, often discouraged	Unlimited, actively seeks new animals
Placement	Actively seeks to re-home	Usually avoids any placement
Breeding	Most animals s/n or separated to prevent breeding	Accidental or even intentional breeding is common
Funding	Often diverse sources, usually non-profit	Often self-supported but may have non-profit status or exploit "angels"
Staff	Adequate, stable may have paid staff	Inadequate, family, transient volunteers
Veterinary Care	Adequate to excellent, may have staff or contract	Inadequate, often emergency only - if any
Offense History	none	Often has previous charges

19

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.






Available at
sheltervet.org and
aspcapro.org/asv

This document helps educate the Court and others to what is considered a reasonable standard of care by a shelter or rescue

Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters
The Association of Shelter Veterinarians • 2010

Authors:
 Sandra Newbury, Mary K. Blain, Philip A. Bosby, Cynthia Barker Cox, Julie D. Dinnaie, Brenda Griffin, Kate F. Hurley, Natalie Isozo, Wes Jones, Lila Miller, Jeanette O'Quin, Gary J. Patronak, Martha Smith-Blackmore, Miranda Spindel


21
 © 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Common Excuses for Inadequate Care

- Short term excuse for long-standing problem
 - “My handyman has been sick this week”
 - “I hurt my back and can’t lift the sacks of food”
- Recent Acquisition (but no supporting paperwork or other contradictory evidence —e.g. witness accounts)
 - “They came in this way...”
 - “We just got them...”
- “The ‘Hospice’ Argument”
 - “ We are providing death with dignity”
 - “We keep the bodies in the cage for a few days to give the soul time to depart”

22
 © 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Intervention Strategies

Type of Hoarder	Persuasion	Threat of Legal Action	Prosecution
Exploiter	Unlikely to be effective	Unlikely to be intimidated	Usually essential
Rescue Hoarder	Unlikely to be effective, at least initially	Must offer potential for scaled-down operation	May be Required when threats fail
Overwhelmed Caregiver	Likely to be receptive	May be enough to reduce recidivism	Often unnecessary or counter-productive

23

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Special Concerns in Responding to Rescue Hoarders

- Usually intelligent, articulate, media-savvy and litigious
- Often have current support from local agencies and organizations
- May have had prior support from agencies that are now investigating them
- Large numbers of animals present housing, veterinary, and zoonotic challenges to responders
- Social services does not view them as a threat to self or others
- Prosecutors unwilling to pursue charges without solid evidence of cruelty
- Judges insensitive to the severity of the problem
- Little prospect of restitution

24

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved





Supporters picket court on behalf of Linda Bruno, operator of Tiger Ranch Cat Sanctuary

25

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Conditions at Tiger Ranch documented by PA SPCA and ASPCA

26

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



Sentencing in Tiger Ranch (July 2009)

- Charged with over 500 counts based on 750 animals
- Pled guilty to 12 counts of misdemeanor cruelty, 2 counts of tampering with public records
- \$212,000 in fines and restitution
- 27 years probation
- 2 years house arrest
- 6 months in jail (served 37 days)
- Dissolution of organization
- ... many animals placed by PA SPCA

27

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.



Special Investigative Issues for Rescue Hoarding Situations

- Preserve media evidence – archive potentially misleading websites, print every page (may disappear when action is taken)
- Preserve Facebook, Twitter traffic
- Follow the Money – may lead to Federal charges that can provide for monitoring across state lines if operation moves
- Review IRS 990 Forms for discrepancies (e.g. little funding spent on vet care, payments to family members)
- Contact IRS, State Attorney General, US Attorney
- Archive fund-raising appeals
- Be prepared for special forensic requirements, e.g. excavation of clandestine graves
- Be alert to higher risk of zoonotic diseases

28

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.



RESPONSES AND SOLUTIONS



© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved

Outcome Goals for Hoarding Cases

- Care for people at risk – elderly, children, handicapped
- Relapse Prevention
- Long-term mandatory psychiatric assessment /counseling
- Long-term probation
- Probation to include no-contact with animals order
- Unannounced monitoring of home
- Restitution to agencies providing care for animals
- Possible jail time, as a deterrent to re-offense
- Care for and/or removal of animals at risk
- Possible prohibition of occupancy



30

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved

Components of a Settlement

- Specify how many animals may be cared for in any capacity, in any premises
- Require sterilization of any animals that are kept
- Specify details of care, plan for vet care and keeping of records
- Require compliance with all relevant laws
- Specify consequences of failure to comply

31

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.



For Further Information

Tufts Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium

<http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding.html>

ASPCapro Fighting Cruelty

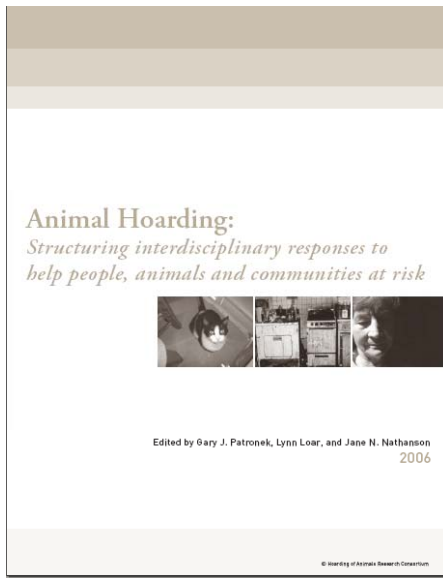
<http://www.aspcapro.org/fighting-animal-cruelty.php>

ASPCA

<http://www.aspcapro.org/cruelty>

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved.





Resource on community response to hoarding

<http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding.html>

33

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved



COMING ATTRACTIONS FROM ASPCApro.org

Visit our directory of
upcoming webinars including our new
Prosecuting Animal Abuse series
& dozens of archived webinars

<http://www.aspcapro.org/upcoming-webinars.php>

34

© 2011 ASPCA® All Rights Reserved

