

My name is Brett Kirby and I am a Lieutenant with Westport Fire Department. I am also a member of the Safer Homes Task Force, a local hoarding initiative that covers the three towns of Westport, Weston and Wilton and I am a member of the Statewide Hoarding Working Group. I am here to offer my full support for Bill #18, to create a task force to deal with the issue of hoarding.

I would like to briefly discuss the issue as it relates to the safety of first responders, specifically Fire, Police and EMS personnel.

By the nature of their job, first responders are very often the first to encounter a hoarding situation. Because people who are affected by this disorder very rarely self-identify, an emergency call from their home is quite often the first time anyone may realize that a home is affected.

Currently, there is no statewide, uniform process for identifying and recording the presence of hoarding conditions found during routine public safety calls. There is also no statewide method for accurately reporting these emergency responses within public safety agencies, something that would be critical to keeping our first responders safe and well informed in planning their emergency response to residences impacted by hoarding conditions.

Additionally, properties impacted by hoarding conditions can be extremely hazardous to personnel responding to emergency calls.

At times, this may mean that belongings are piled so high that there is a serious danger of items collapsing on fire, police, and/or ems personnel that are responding to a call for help. The structural integrity of a building is also often compromised, resulting in the potential for floor and roof collapse. As an example, there was an incident in Cheshire last year where the hoarding conditions in one home caused the first floor to collapse into the basement and, unfortunately, the homeowner perished as a result. This very easily could have been firefighters, police officers or EMT's responding to a call for help.

Excessive clutter inside a home makes it almost impossible for occupants to escape their home in an emergency situation. In 2012, a Greenwich homeowner died and a family member was severely burned in the home that was impassable internally due to excessive clutter. These types of conditions also make searching for and successfully extricating victims almost impossible, and also extremely dangerous. Just last year an FDNY Lieutenant died while performing a search for occupants during a fire in an apartment that was affected by these types of dangerous conditions.

Further, this excessive amount of combustible belongings inside a home also contributes to the extent and speed of fire spread. Just a few months ago in September 2014, a mother died and two members of a Bridgeport, CT family, including a young child, were left in critical condition after a fire in their apartment, which was likely fueled by the excessive amount of clutter and belongings within the apartment.

From an EMS perspective, the routine removal of occupants is sometimes impossible due to hoarding conditions as there is rarely enough room for a stretcher to be maneuvered through a home. This delays emergency transport for life threatening conditions. For instance, our fire department recently assisted in extricating a resident through a ground floor window that had to be removed, due to restricted access throughout the home.

Environmental hazards caused by animal hoarding are extremely hazardous, not only to the occupants, but also to the health of the first responders attempting to help them.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for remaining dedicated to the continued safety and health of our residents and our dedicated first responders.

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