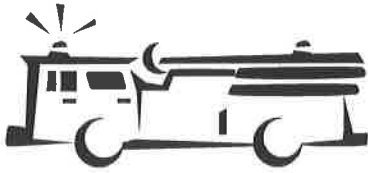


Health and Safety Standards

Fire Services



Fire Services can encounter hoarding situations when responding to emergencies or through fire safety inspections initiated by concerned family, landlords, neighbours and others¹.

In Ontario, when there are reasonable grounds to believe that a risk of fire poses an Immediate Threat to Life, an assistant to the Fire Marshal or a fire chief has the authority to enter and inspect the land or premises at all reasonable times without a warrant for the purpose of assessing fire safety, removing or reducing the threat. If denied entry, the inspector must obtain an entry warrant to conduct the inspection.

- Common fire safety concerns in hoarding situations include blocked means of egress (hallways, stairs); fire load (weight of items on the structure of the home); combustibles near sources of ignition (i.e. stove, radiator, exposed lightbulbs); no working smoke alarm or carbon monoxide alarm.

If the dwelling unit is in contravention of the Ontario Fire Code or if other fire hazards are identified, Fire Services may:

- 1) Issue an **Inspection Order** that identifies the hazard(s) or violation(s) of the Ontario Fire Code and what needs to be done within a specified timeframe to remedy it. Orders are used when the contravention is not deemed an immediate fire safety issue. The owner/occupant must comply with the order or they could face serious fines, closure of the property and/or court proceedings. A follow-up inspection is required to determine if the hazard(s) have been corrected.
- 2) Deem the situation an **Immediate Threat to Life**. This is an extraordinary authority utilized when there is an imminent risk of fire and the circumstances pose an immediate threat to human life. It authorizes Fire Services to do what is necessary to address the risk, such as posting a fire watch, removing the occupants, removing the combustibles, etc. The costs to do this could be charged back to the owner/occupant.

Fire Services do not evict tenants but may require the occupant(s) be temporarily removed until the threat to life has been remedied. Landlords, however, may use the Inspection Order and other Fire Services documentation in their eviction proceedings.

For further detail about the legislated authority of Fire Services, the Ontario Fire Marshal “Fire Safety Inspections and Enforcement Guideline” (OFM-TG-01-2012) can be read online through the Office of the Fire Marshal website.

¹ Note to health care professionals (HCPs): There is no legal obligation for HCPs to report an unsafe hoarding or clutter situation to Fire Services. Any such disclosure by a HCP about client they are working with must be done in keeping with the consent requirements of the privacy legislation.