

# Hoarding Can Be Costly to Heirs

By Wesley E. Wright and Molly Dear Abshire, as published in the Houston Chronicle Senior Living Section on January 18, 2012.

Hoarding, also called compulsive hoarding or compulsive hoarding syndrome, is receiving more attention thanks to the popular cable program Hoarders, which sheds light on how the disorder negatively affects the quality of life of the hoarding individual, as well as their loved ones and neighbors.

Hoarding is a compulsion to collect and store certain objects for various reasons. It may be a mental disorder, a physical illness or a lack of time to deal with the clutter. Many hoarders don't believe they have a problem. Small scale hoarders, or pack rats, may save stacks of old documents, mail or sentimental items. Extreme hoarders purchase endless goods and merchandise, regardless if they need it, and even save their garbage. They create massive piles throughout their homes leaving narrow trails to get from room to room.

We know that hoarding creates negative environments for people with the problem, but what happens when they die? Imagine you're an heir to a hoarder's estate. How will you find the necessary documentation to handle the estate, like probating a Will and distributing assets, when you can barely squeeze through their mess? Consider the costs of riffling through a severely cluttered property.

For example, in one case a deceased hoarder left stacked papers, documents and trash three feet deep. So complete was the mess there were tiny rabbit trails from one room to the next, just enough to walk through them one step at a time. Active stock certificates were among trash on the floor. Unopened bills and important documents were everywhere.

When confronted with this dilemma, the named fiduciary is responsible for marshaling assets into their control and has no other choice but to sift through everything for important material and assets.

In this case, the house smelled strongly of mold, so a makeshift table was set up in the front yard for three assistants to sort through the discovered documents. At the end of the first day, two out of three assistants were sick.

As a result, an order was signed by the court authorizing the house to be evaluated for mold spores. The spore count was so high it was immeasurable! A remediation report was made and, by law, the remediate cannot be with the same company as the reporter.\*\*? layman's terms? Another court order was necessary to authorize mold removal. Men in space suits with special vacuums worked for several days removing the mold. The cost? \$12,000.

Children of hoarders are often faced with the responsibility of sifting through and cleaning up a home overflowing with their deceased parent's possessions. Cleaning a hoarder's home can cost up to \$20,000 or more depending on laws about proper disposal of hazardous materials, as well as the home's condition. Because clean-ups may last several weeks to months, the hoarder's children may have to take time off of work and spend time away from family and friends. And all of this while dealing with the loss of a parent, handling funeral arrangements and probate.

