



NATIONAL STUDY GROUP ON  
CHRONIC DISORGANIZATION

# **The NSGCD Clutter Hoarding Scale**

*Official Organizational Assessment Tool*

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# **The NSGCD Clutter-Hoarding Scale**

**A Study Guide for Professional Organizers  
and Related Professionals**

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## PURPOSE OF THE SCALE

The purpose of the *NSGCD Clutter-Hoarding Scale* is to guide professional organizers<sup>1</sup> and related professionals in their initial, pre-session contact (phone or onsite) or first session assessment work. This scale is primarily based on the interior of a home, *except* where the outside structure affects the overall safety of the interior, as indicated. It *does not* include sheds and unattached garages or outbuildings.

The NSGCD Clutter-Hoarding Scale is an assessment measurement tool developed by the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD) to give professional organizers and related professionals definitive parameters. These parameters relate to health and safety issues and present a potential range in which professional organizers and related professionals may actually choose to work. The NSGCD is a Non-profit 501C3 educational organization whose mission is to educate professional organizers and related professionals on the issues relating to Chronic Disorganization.

This scale was publicly released in October 2003. Individuals or agencies quoting Levels as listed on this chart should list the NSGCD as the creating organization. Developers of this Clutter-Hoarding scale are NSGCD members Sheila Delson, Cindy Glovinsky, Terry Prince and Heidi Schultz

## PARAMETERS OF THE LEVELS

NSGCD has established five levels to indicate the degree of household clutter and hoarding from a professional organizer's<sup>2</sup> and related professional's perspective: Level I is low; Level IV is high. Within each level there are four specific categories which define the severity of clutter and hoarding potential:

- Structure and zoning<sup>3</sup>;
- Pets and rodents;
- Household functions;
- Sanitation and cleanliness.

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<sup>1</sup> A professional organizer is an organizer who receives remuneration for organizing services, maintains professional standards and ethics defined by association affiliations, and continually educates him or herself in the organizing field and /or specialty areas.

<sup>2</sup> A professional organizer's perspective includes understanding animal regulations and ordinances, building and zoning safety guidelines, general health and safety guidelines, as well as the degree of clutter.

<sup>3</sup> When dealing with structural issues, a professional organizer needs to know if client is tenant or owner. Owner is responsible for many items under federal, state and local housing codes. Tenant may be hesitant to call owner for repairs due to excessive clutter.

One problem found in any of these four categories may indicate the need for further investigation regarding the whole level.

**Level I.** Household is considered standard. No special knowledge in working with the Chronically Disorganized is necessary.

**Level II.** Household requires professional organizers or related professionals to have additional knowledge and understanding of Chronic Disorganization.

**Level III.** Household may require services in addition to those a professional organizer and related professional can provide. Professional organizers and related professionals working with Level III households should have significant training in Chronic Disorganization and have developed a helpful community network of resources, especially mental health providers.

**Level IV.** Household needs the help of a professional organizer and a coordinated team of service providers. Psychological, medical issues or financial hardships are generally involved. Resources will be necessary to bring a household to a functional level. These services may include pest control services, "crime scene cleaners," financial counseling and licensed contractors and handypersons.

**Level V.** Household will require intervention from a wide range of agencies. Professional organizers should not venture directly into working solo with this type of household. The Level V household may be under the care of a conservator or be an inherited estate of a mentally ill individual. Assistance is needed from many sources. A team needs to be assembled. Members of the team should be identified before beginning additional work. These members may include social services and psychological/mental health representative (not applicable if inherited estate), conservator/trustee, building and zoning, fire and safety, landlord, legal aid and/or legal representatives. A written strategy needs to be outlined and contractual agreements made before proceeding.

## **FUTURE PROJECTS**

The NSGCD will work to develop recommended guidelines for working with Level III–V clients and households. These guidelines will include project management strategies for the professional organizer, collaborative therapy recommendations, compliance and managing government agency regulations and reporting requirements, as well as organizational techniques.

# NSGCD CLUTTER-HOARDING SCALE

Level	Structure & Zoning Issues	Pets & Rodents	Household Functions	Sanitation & Cleanliness
<b>I</b>	All doors and stairways accessible	Normal household pet activity  1–3 spills or pet accidents evident  Light evidence of rodents/insects	Clutter not excessive	Normal housekeeping  Safe and healthy sanitation  No odors
<b>II</b>	1 exit blocked  1 major appliance or regionally appropriate heating, cooling or ventilation device not working for longer than 6 months	Some pet odor  Cat spray or pet waste puddles  Light pet dander in evidence  3 or more incidents of feces in cat box  Limited fish, reptile or bird pet care  Light-to-medium evidence of common household rodents/insects	Clutter inhibits use of more than two rooms  Unclear functions of living room, bedroom  Slight narrowing of household pathways	Limited evidence of housekeeping, vacuuming, sweeping  Tolerable, but not pleasant, odors  Overflowing garbage cans  Light-to-medium mildew in bathroom or kitchen  Moderately soiled food preparation surfaces

Level	Structure & Zoning Issues	Pets & Rodents	Household Functions	Sanitation & Cleanliness
III	<p>Visible clutter outdoors</p> <p>Items normally stored indoors evident outside (TV, sofa)</p> <p>2 or more appliances broken or not functioning</p> <p>Inappropriate and/or excessive use of electric and extension cords</p> <p>Light structural damage limited to 1 part of home; recent (less than 6 months)</p>	<p>Pets exceed local Humane Society limits by 1–3 animals, excluding well-cared-for puppy or kitten litter less than 4 months old</p> <p>Stagnant fish tank</p> <p>Poorly maintained reptile aquarium; odor and waste</p> <p>Bird droppings not recently cleaned</p> <p>Audible, but not visible, evidence of rodents</p> <p>Light flea infestation</p> <p>Medium amount of spider webs inside house</p>	<p>Visible clutter outdoors</p> <p>Narrowed hall and stair</p> <p>1 bathroom or bedroom not fully usable; i.e. items stored in shower</p> <p>Small amounts of 1–2 obviously hazardous substances, chemicals, substance spills, broken glass</p>	<p>Excessive dust</p> <p>Bed linens, including pillow, show evidence of dirt, long time use</p> <p>No evidence of any recent vacuuming or sweeping</p> <p>Heavily soiled food preparation surfaces</p> <p>Obvious and irritating odor</p> <p>Unused, full or odorous garbage cans</p> <p>Dirty or soiled laundry throughout house, exceeding 3 hamper-size baskets per bedroom</p>

Level	Structure & Zoning Issues	Pets & Rodents	Household Functions	Sanitation & Cleanliness
<b>IV</b>	<p>Structural damage to part of home (longer than 6 months)</p> <p>Mold or mildew on walls or floors</p> <p>In appropriate use of appliance: storing paper in oven; storing nonfood items in refrigerator (beyond batteries, film)</p> <p>Evidence of damage to 2 or more sections of wall board</p> <p>Faulty weather protection: deteriorated or ineffective waterproofing of exterior walls, roof, foundation or floors, including broken windows or doors; missing or damaged gutters/downspouts</p> <p>Hazardous electrical wiring</p> <p>Odor or evidence of sewage backup</p>	<p>Pets exceed local Humane Society limits by 4 animals (any type)</p> <p>Obvious aged animal waste exceeding 2–3 recent “accidents”</p> <p>Pet dander on all furnishings</p> <p>Pet has free range with evidence of destructive behavior, clawed furnishings, chewed doors or frame</p> <p>Excessive spiders and webs</p> <p>Bats, squirrels, raccoons in attic or room</p> <p>Flea infestation</p>	<p>Designated bedroom unusable; using living area or sleeping on sofa or floor</p> <p>Hazardous materials stored inside of home, e.g. gasoline, aged, rusted and leaking paint or household chemical cans and bottles</p> <p>Excessive combustible and highly flammable packed material in living area or attached garage</p>	<p>Rotting food on counters</p> <p>1–15 aged canned goods with buckled tops and sides</p> <p>No covers on beds, sleeping directly on mattress, lice on bedding or furnishings</p> <p>No clean dishes or utensils locatable in kitchen</p>



Level	Structure & Zoning Issues	Pets & Rodents	Household Functions	Sanitation & Cleanliness
V	<p>Structural damage obvious in home</p> <p>Broken walls</p> <p>No electrical power, except for rural homes not serviced by power companies</p> <p>No water connections</p> <p>No sewer, septic system nonoperational</p> <p>Standing water in basement or room</p> <p>Fire hazard, hazardous material or contaminants storage exceeds local ordinances</p>	<p>Pets dangerous to occupants and/or guests</p> <p>Rodents evident and in sight</p> <p>Mosquito or insect infestations</p> <p>Regional “critter” infestations; i.e. snakes in interior of home</p>	<p>Kitchen and bathroom unusable due to clutter</p> <p>Client sleeping elsewhere as house is not livable</p>	<p>Human defecation</p> <p>Rotting food</p> <p>More than 15 aged canned goods with buckled tops and sides</p>