

ENFORCEMENT Hoarding

A Laguna Woods, Calif., association is making residents tidy up by putting a no-clutter rule into play earlier this spring.

Under the rule, residents of the cooperative housing section of Laguna Woods Village, an active senior community, must keep homes free of excessive clutter to prevent widespread fires and to ensure emergency rescuers, maintenance providers and others are able to safely and quickly use the space. Suspected hoarders are asked to show their homes to an inspector and are required to remove items until the space is no longer a hazard. Refusal could result in a reprimand ranging from a fine to revoking membership—standard procedure for any rules violation.

While it's a fine line distinguishing between a messy resident and hoarder, Wendy Bucknum, Laguna Woods Village's government and public affairs manager, says the clutter rule isn't a crusade for cleanliness. "(No one's) saying, 'Your house isn't clean to my specifications,'" says Bucknum. "It's more about preventing risks."

Hoarding can be a sign of a mental illness, and making



PILED HIGH. Trash and possessions stack up in an Orange County, Calif., home. Laguna Woods Village is combating hoarding with a new anti-clutter rule.

hoarders remove their items can be traumatic. The association is encouraging hoarders to work with its social services department to make the process easier and to provide them access to mental health providers. Even if an association doesn't have a social services center, it can help its residents anyway. "Any community could form an alliance with local health agencies or local social services that could be helpful to residents," Bucknum says.