Domestic Squalor and Hoarding Policy

Sutherland Shire Council
Document review and approval
This document has been approved by

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Revision history

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Policy statement

Sutherland Shire Council implements a staged process to assess, manage, refer and finalise Domestic Squalor and Hoarding issues. In the majority of cases of domestic squalor and hoarding, Council will not undertake direct service provision. Council will only become involved in the direct resolution of domestic squalor and hoarding cases in extraordinary circumstances and will assist in finalising long term and/or complex, squalor/hoarding issues.

Rationale

The Local Government Act, 1993 and the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997, prescribe the remedies that Council can apply when a property is found to be in squalor. Sutherland Shire Council officers may intervene if land or premises are not kept in a safe and healthy condition.

In all reports referred to Council, involvement in the process of managing domestic squalor and hoarding issues will be at the discretion of the General Manager of Sutherland Shire Council.

Framework

Council will respond to Domestic Squalor and Hoarding using a three stage process determined according to the capacity of the resident to respond to the issue and the resources available to address the matter.

The staged process may involve a number of Council Units and community and government organisations.

Definitions

*Domestic Squalor* is extreme household uncleanliness usually characterised by an accumulation of material which has led to the living environment being unclean, unsanitary or dangerous.

*Hoarding* is an excessive accumulation of possessions or animals in a more systematic way. Hoarding can lead to the living environment becoming unclean or dangerous (eg; fire risk).
**Household Neglect** is the failure to remove household waste and other rubbish including papers, wrapping, food, cooking waste, containers and discarded household items. This differs from domestic squalor in that it has not reached a point where health concerns have resulted.

**Forensic Cleaning** is the cleansing of a property by qualified professionals where the scene is highly toxic and contaminated.

**Industrial Cleaning** is the cleansing of a property where the property is not considered toxic, however heavy duty equipment and chemicals will be required to clean effectively.

**Capacity** refers to an individual’s ability to make decisions about things that affect daily life.

**Indicators**

When a referral to Council, relating to Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matter arises, the following key indicators may assist Council officers in determining the nature of the issue.

- Accumulation of unnecessary items such as newspapers
- Evidence of neglect and excessive numbers of animals at the property
- Overgrown gardens
- General uncleanliness and unsanitary condition inside the house
- Infestation of the premises by vermin or insects
- A strong smell of ammonia

**Contributing factors**

Domestic Squalor and Hoarding can affect people of all ages and backgrounds and can be triggered by

- Physical and/or mental health issues
- Poor Living skills

Life experiences eg recent trauma; loss, disadvantage. There is no specific reason why residents experience this disorder.
Consequences
Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matters have consequences that impact individuals and the community including:

- Family and support network impacts - disengagement with the community, removal of dependent children and/or removal of animals from the property
- Neighbours impacts - conflict, injury, illness and bio hazard contamination
- Eviction and possible homelessness
- Financial impacts - local area property values

When there is no intervention in a Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matter it is likely that the situation may escalate increasing the potential for illness, falls, impact injuries and death may result.
Guidelines for the Management of Domestic Squalor and Hoarding

Referral

Domestic Squalor and Hoarding referrals may come from a range of sources including, Council employees, Councillors, members of the public, government departments and non government organisations.

The following Guidelines have been developed to effectively refer matters to Units within Council and to external agencies. The Guidelines include processes from the point of initial referral from internal and external customers to Council’s Environment & Health Regulation Unit, Environmental & Building Compliance Unit, Environmental Protection and Regulation Unit, (EHR, EBC, EPR) Units and then, through a three stage process undertaken by the Communities Unit.

The Guidelines will inform the following Council Units and external agencies:

1. EHR, EBC, EPR Units
   - Environment & Health Regulation Unit
   - Environmental & Building Compliance Unit,
   - Environmental Protection and Regulation Unit
2. Communities Unit
3. External agencies e.g.; community organisations and government departments

Guidelines for initial referral of Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matters to:

- Environment & Health Regulation Unit (EHR),
- Environmental & Building Compliance Unit, (EBC)
- Environmental Protection and Regulation Unit (EPR)

1. A CRMS is generated, providing basic details of Domestic Squalor and Hoarding concern, including address of property.
2. The CRMS is referred to the relevant Council Unit (EHR, EBC,EPR),
   - EPR may be required to issue orders to cleanse a property and surrounds or remove pets
   - EBC may be required to issue orders to ensure a residence is repaired to ensure safety
EHR may be required to investigate a neighbour complaint.

3. Required action is taken by the Unit i.e. issuing orders.

4. If the issue has not been resolved within the standard response time required in the Orders issued by the abovementioned Units, in the time required to meet the CRMS reporting requirement for the matter, or it is clear that the resident involved has little or no capacity to effect change, the Unit responsible for initial action is required to complete the **DOMESTIC SQUALOR AND HOARDING REFERRAL AND INVENTORY FORM - COMMUNITIES UNIT (ATT:1)** and refer the matter to the Communities Unit.

5. This form is to be attached to the existing CRMS together with relevant information regarding history and extraordinary circumstances.

6. The referring Council officer will also include scanned note book entries using Council’s standard procedures for note taking and include scanned photographs as attachments to the CRMS.

7. The CRMS, including all the information about the matter, should be forwarded to Manager - Communities Unit

8. The Manager - Communities Unit will determine the next course of action for the matter.
REFERRAL TO COMMUNITIES UNIT

Using the Domestic Squalor and Hoarding Referral Form

The DOMESTIC SQUALOR AND HOARDING REFERRAL AND INVENTORY FORM- COMMUNITIES UNIT (ATT: 1) is only to be completed following a site visit by:
Environment & Health Regulation Unit, Environmental & Building Compliance Unit, Environmental Protection and Regulation Unit, (EHR, EBC, EPR) Units.

IF YOU HAVE SERIOUS CONCERNS FOR THE SAFETY OF ANY INDIVIDUAL
Call 000 AT ANY TIME
FAST ACTION CAN SAVE LIVES

The aim of the Communities Unit in accepting any referral is to achieve the long term management and resolution of Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matters in a timely fashion. Referrals to the Communities Unit follow a three stage process. The stages are outlined below.

STAGE ONE: Referring Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matters to the Communities Unit

Following receipt of the completed DOMESTIC SQUALOR AND HOARDING REFERRAL AND INVENTORY FORM - COMMUNITIES UNIT (ATT:1) the Manager – Communities Unit will conduct the following basic searches and enquiries.
1. Current notices served on the individual or on the property
2. History of contact with NSW Police, Miranda or Sutherland Local area Command
3. History of previous complaints/concerns relating to the property and the resident as documented on CRMS
4. Identified Work Health and Safety issues including bio hazard risks
5. Possible contacts for next of Kin
6. Current or previous engagement with NSW Department of Health, Mental Health or Aged Care Assessment Team, NSW Department of Human Services, Ageing Disability and Home Care (ADHC), NSW Department of
Human Services - Community Services, Office of the Public Guardian, Commission for Children and Young People or other statutory body.

7. The resident’s previous correspondence or interaction with Council.
8. Where the resident’s General Practitioner is known, the Unit will endeavour to contact the General Practitioner or other health care professional using the LETTER TO GENERAL PRACTITIONER SEEKING SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE OF RELATIVES (ATT:2).

Completed searches and enquiries will be attached to the original CRMS.

The level of complexity of the case and availability of external support agencies will determine whether the matter will be referred to:
- STAGE TWO, an external case management support organisation listed in the online Sutherland Shire Council Community Directory or referred to
- STAGE THREE, a Council Community Services Officer.

STAGE TWO: Referring Domestic Squalor and Hoarding reports to external organisations

1. The Manager - Communities Unit will confirm that an external organisation will accept the management of the Domestic Squalor and Hoarding matter.
2. The existing CRMS will be finalised noting the contact details and organisation to which the matter was referred, the service to be provided to the resident; and the outcome of the action.

STAGE THREE: Domestic Squalor and Hoarding reports supported by Communities Unit

The Manager – Communities Unit will allocate a Communities Unit Officers to undertake the following:

1. Attempt to contact the resident directly and determine the residents agreement to receive Council’s support to change their current circumstances.
2. Arrange any support required by additional Council officers or emergency services (Police, Fire, and Ambulance) in a timely manner and in accordance with any MOU’s established.
3. Determine any issues that relate to provision of consent taking note of issues relating to capacity of resident to make informed decisions independently.

4. If capacity can be confirmed, provide an **ASSISTANCE CONSENT FORM (ATT: 3)** to the resident, and obtain the signature.

5. Using the **ASSISTANCE CONSENT FORM, (ATT: 3)** liaise with the resident to determine a method of management, including removal of materials, cleansing the property and appropriate referral to support organisations to conduct long term management of the issue.

6. Where capacity is limited and consent can not be obtained, attempt to determine if a next of kin can provide support, or as a last resort, investigate NSW Guardianship Tribunal options.

7. If it is determined that the resident has capacity and will not accept assistance from Council, refer the matter back to EHR, EBC, EPR Units to progress the matter.

In taking any action regarding the long term management of Domestic Squalor and Hoarding reports, all Council officers must be aware of and implement the following:

**Privacy Considerations**

Privacy considerations will be addressed in accordance with the *Sutherland Shire Council Privacy Management Plan* and the State Government of NSW 1998, *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act.*
REFERENCES


10. Sutherland Shire Council online *Community Directory*.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Domestic Squalor and Hoarding Referral and Inventory Form – Communities Unit

Attachment 2: Letter to General Practitioner seeking support and assistance of relatives

Attachment 3: Assistance Consent Form