

City crew moves in on hoarder; Man failed to obey cleanup order

Ottawa Citizen
Sun Apr 15 2012
Page: B4
Section: City
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Julie Oliver, The Ottawa Citizen

City workers survey accumulated debris at the Riverview Park home of Zev Kalin on Friday. Kalin, 52, who is unemployed and trying to obtain disability compensation, says he understands why his neighbours are upset about the state of his yard and says depression and obsessive compulsive disorder led to his hoarding.

City workers visited an Ottawa man's house on Friday to remove hoarded junk from his yard after complaints were lodged.

Zev Kalin, who lives in Riverview Park, has been hoarding various forms of garden-related rubbish and debris in his yard.

Kalin received a notice from the city on March 23 ordering him to clean up the mess by April 11, which he failed to do.

Neighbour Justin Berrow said he had watched the rubbish pile get bigger and bigger for two years.

"Everybody was kind of scratching their heads at first, wondering what on

Earth he was doing," Berrow said.

"I think it's a good thing that it got cleaned up."

Kalin said he felt bad about the mess and understood why his neighbours would not have appreciated it.

"It looked horrible. It was an eyesore. I freely admit that. It's my own fault."

Kalin said he had been diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression, and that was responsible for his hoarding.

"Obviously I have a problem," he said.

He saw a therapist for 17 years, but stopped two years ago because of a lack of progress, he said.

The house belongs to Kalin's father. Kalin moved in over two years ago to take care of his ailing mother, who died in October 2009.

He is now being threatened with eviction by his father, who doesn't live with him. Kalin says he has nowhere to go if he gets kicked out.

Kalin, who is 52, used to do environmental consulting, but is currently unemployed. He's trying to get disability compensation, but he first has to be seeing a therapist regularly.

He's currently on a waiting list to get another therapist, he said, but it can take up to a year to see someone whose services are paid for by the province.

Hoarding has been in the spotlight recently, but Sherry Beadle, a program manager with Ottawa Public Health, says it has actually been a problem for a while.

"This is an issue that has been present in our communities for well over a decade," she said. "This is not a new issue."

According to Elaine Birchall, a registered social worker and director of Ottawa-based Birchall Consulting, which helps people deal with hoarding, at least five per cent of the population exhibit hoarding symptoms and perhaps as much as double that estimate.

Hoarders are widely misunderstood, Birchall said. "They can't focus long enough. They can't make the decisions that are necessary in order to figure out where things need to go, and what they need and don't need.

"It is a legitimate disorder," she said. "You wouldn't tell someone who has had an allergic reaction to something to just get over it."