

CLIENT DIGNITY, PROPERTY PROTECTION & DECISION POINTS DURING CLEANOUTS

FIELD RESOURCE

A practical guide for balancing cleanup objectives with dignity, retained-property protection, privacy, communication and careful decision-making.

A Home Is More Than the Material Inside It

In a severe clutter or hoarding environment, one person's "debris" may sit beside another person's photographs, identification, medication, family records, mobility equipment or irreplaceable keepsakes. A successful cleanout therefore requires more than physical removal. It requires a defined objective, clear authority, careful communication and a practical method for distinguishing what is authorized for removal from what must remain.

OUR OPERATING PRINCIPLE: Help improve the environment without losing sight of the person who lives there. Cleanup should be organized, respectful and tied to an authorized objective - not driven by judgment about how a home should look.

Five Decisions That Should Be Clear Before Removal Begins

1. What is the objective?	Safe pathways? Functional bathroom? Reduced accumulation? Full cleanout? Preparation for repair? The goal determines the scope.
2. Who has authority?	Identify who can authorize removal, approve the project and make decisions when uncertain property is discovered.
3. What must remain?	Identify retained categories, rooms, containers and specific belongings before unrestricted removal begins.
4. What requires a decision?	Create a method for setting aside uncertain documents, valuables, photographs, medications or other items instead of guessing.
5. What information may be documented?	Establish what photographs, notes and project records are appropriate and authorized for the particular referral.

THREE-CATEGORY PROPERTY DECISION SYSTEM

REMOVE Clearly authorized trash, debris, furniture, contents or materials included in the approved scope.	RETAIN Clearly identified property that must remain, be consolidated or be protected from removal.	HOLD / REVIEW Uncertain property that should be isolated for an authorized decision rather than discarded by assumption.
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High-Priority Items That May Require Protection or Review

The categories below are not automatically required to be retained in every project. They are examples of property that can warrant deliberate identification, protection or authorized review before disposal decisions are made.

Identity & Legal	Driver's licenses, Social Security cards, birth certificates, passports, court papers, deeds, titles and other official records.
Financial / Benefits	Bank records, benefit correspondence, tax records, insurance documents, checks, cash or financial instruments.
Medical / Accessibility	Medication, prescription information, medical devices, oxygen-related equipment, walkers, canes, wheelchairs and accessibility aids.
Family / Sentimental	Photographs, albums, letters, heirlooms, memorial items, military memorabilia and other irreplaceable keepsakes.
Keys / Access	House keys, vehicle keys, safe keys, storage keys, remotes, access cards and combinations when identified.
Electronics / Data	Phones, tablets, computers, external drives or other devices that may contain personal information.
Jewelry / Collectibles	Jewelry, coins, watches, collections, antiques or objects that may not appear valuable at first glance.
Client-Selected Essentials	Clothing, furniture, cookware, bedding, pet supplies or other belongings specifically designated to remain.

Privacy & Documentation

Photographs	Use project photographs only when appropriate and authorized. Frame images around property conditions and work performed rather than unnecessarily capturing personal information.
Documents / Personal Data	Avoid displaying, copying or distributing personal records beyond what is necessary for the authorized project. Confidential information should follow the referring agency's approved communication process.
Social Media / Marketing	APS-related or vulnerable-client property conditions should never be treated as marketing content without appropriate authorization. Illustrative or staged examples are safer for public educational materials.
Crew Conduct	Professional behavior matters. Avoid ridicule, commentary about the resident, unnecessary discussion of personal belongings or sharing property details outside the work need.

Printable Retained-Property & Decision Worksheet

Use this worksheet to identify categories that should be protected or reviewed. Do not place confidential client information on this worksheet unless agency policy and approved handling practices permit it.

ITEMS / CATEGORIES TO RETAIN OR REVIEW	
■ Identification / legal documents	■ Financial / benefit records
■ Medication / medical equipment	■ Photographs / albums
■ Letters / family records	■ Jewelry / valuables
■ Cash / checks / financial instruments	■ Keys / remotes / access cards
■ Phones / computers / data devices	■ Mobility / accessibility equipment
■ Furniture designated to remain	■ Clothing / bedding designated to remain
■ Pet supplies / animal-care items	■ Collectibles / antiques
■ Military / memorial items	■ Other: _____

WHEN AN ITEM IS UNCERTAIN

Recommended decision path: Do not guess -> isolate or set aside when reasonably possible -> identify why the item is uncertain -> contact the authorized decision-maker -> document the direction when appropriate -> proceed according to the approved instruction.

Item / category needing review	_____
Location / container	_____
Reason held for review	_____
Decision / direction received	_____
Authorized by / date	_____

Respectful Communication During Difficult Cleanouts

Use neutral language	Describe conditions factually: “accumulated contents,” “blocked pathway,” or “authorized removal” rather than labels or ridicule.
Explain before acting	When practical, clarify what area is being addressed and what categories are being removed or retained.
Avoid unnecessary pressure	Cleanup objectives and removal decisions should come from the authorized process, not a crew member's personal preference.
Escalate uncertainty	When authority, ownership or retention instructions are unclear, pause the specific decision rather than improvising.

A Better Cleanout Protects Both the Property and the Process

Clear decisions about retained property can reduce accidental loss, prevent confusion, improve communication and help the cleanup crew work more efficiently. For APS-related or other sensitive projects, the strongest process is one where the desired outcome, authority, preservation instructions and documentation expectations are established before large-scale removal begins.

BEFORE Define the objective, authority, retained categories, restricted areas and documentation expectations.	DURING Separate REMOVE / RETAIN / HOLD-REVIEW categories; communicate uncertainty; protect designated property.	AFTER Confirm the authorized scope was completed, identify retained property placement and document unresolved decisions or next steps.
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HELP WITHOUT JUDGMENT.

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