

(U) "Ask Zelda!": Exterminating a Pack Rat

FROM: "Zelda," Dispenser of Advice on Workplace Issues

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(U) Note: The entire column below is unclassified.



Dear Zelda, I have a co-worker who has more than 30 boxes that are very old and are lining our office just collecting dust. Some contractors even have boxes by their feet under their desks. Management chooses to ignore these eye-sores and dust collectors even though I have brought it to their attention. What can we do??

-- Claustrophobic from Clutter

Dear Claustrophobic,

Not only are the boxes eyesores, they are health hazards -- especially if they are blocking or narrowing passageways -- for

- people with dust allergies,
- those with mobility issues,
- potential for tripping,
- in case of a medical emergency (stretcher needs to fit through the aisle),
- during an evacuation, and
- it adds to the "fire load" (fuel), in the event of a fire.

First, contact your OSH rep.* She can help you get some traction with management by officially declaring the situation hazardous.

Once management has directed the owner to get rid of the boxes, you might consider offering to help.

While you can't call professional "clutter busters" to come in and ruthlessly take charge like they do on TV, you **can** help your co-worker sort through the stored materials and archive records that need to be kept.

Personal items that are not being used every day should be brought home. NSAW is experiencing a space crunch and we don't have room to store people's personal effects (such as holiday decorations, no-longer-displayed knickknacks, or several changes of clothes/shoes).

If the items are work related, often an impartial person has an easier time deciding what to keep and what to throw away than the owner. Help Patty Pack Rat go through her things, determine which need to be archived,** and burn bag the rest.

Don't be surprised if you, Patty, and the rest of the office experience a surge in productivity after the purge. (A "Purge Surge"?)* ** **Feng Shui** principles state that clutter causes stagnation in the room's energy... and you might even find an extra contractor or two under the rubble!

Edda

(U) Notes:

* (U) Type "**go oshrep**" in your browser and click on the link "Who is My OSHRep?" at the bottom of the page

** (U) See the **Records Management website** for what needs to be archived.

*** (U) Editor's note: If you aren't familiar with the reference, see **this article**.
