

Recommendations for Property Owners After A Hurricane

If you suffered damage as a result of a hurricane, you should submit a claim under any insurance policy you have that might apply. This includes:

- Flood insurance
- Homeowner's insurance
- Renter's insurance
- Condo insurance
- Auto insurance

Some of these policies may have limitations, or even not apply, to losses associated with hurricanes, but the best practice is to submit the claim to ensure no opportunities for coverage missed.

Steps for Handling Your Insurance Claim

- 1. Submit Your Claim.** As soon as possible, provide a written notice of claim to your insurer according to the notice provision of your policy. Keep a copy for your records. If you don't have a copy of your policy, call the insurance company, ask them how to submit your claim, and request a copy of your policy.
- 2. Confirm Receipt of Your Claim.** An adjuster should reply to confirm receipt of your claim. If nobody contacts you within one to two weeks after you submit your claim, call the insurance company. Repeat this until they confirm receipt of your claim in writing.
- 3. Separate Damaged Property from Undamaged Property.** Don't throw anything away, including damaged property, until an adjuster sees it. If you are required by law to dispose of damaged property, take pictures of the item and keep a sample if you can.
- 4. Protect Undamaged Property.** Protect undamaged property the best you can. If you need to spend money to do so (for example, hire a cleaning company or maintenance contractor), call the insurance company first and get permission.
- 5. Document Your Damages.** Take photos of all damaged property; make a detailed list of damaged or lost items; gather any receipts or documentation of the value of damaged or lost items.
- 6. Comply with Policy Conditions.** Your policy likely has conditions that require you to cooperate with the insurance company's investigation of the loss. Comply with reasonable requests to inspect the property, provide documentation of your loss, complete a proof of loss form, etc.
- 7. Resolve Your Claim.** Work with the adjuster to determine whether your claim is covered and to reach an agreement on the amount you will be paid.
- 8. Seek Help if Needed.** Dealing with insurance claims can be time-consuming and difficult. At any point in the claims process, you can hire a public adjuster, who will work with the insurance company on your behalf and help you with your claim. Public adjusters are usually paid a percentage of any insurance funds you receive, so consider your options carefully. If the insurer denies all or part of your claim, and you don't agree with the denial, you may wish to seek the advice of an attorney.
- 9. Be Timely With Your Submission.** Be sure to provide all of the information and documents requested. Keep a log of all submissions and requests to/from your insurer(s). Items to remember in the log are the (a) measures you have taken to assist your insurance company, (b) information you provide, (c) adjuster names and titles with whom you are interacting, (d) dates of discussions. If you have problems or unreasonable delays, ask to speak to a supervisor or manager. Another option to consider, prior to hiring an attorney, is contacting the appropriate state department of insurance to file a formal complaint (this is free and often helpful).

Flood Loss:

Ask your insurance agent if you purchased this coverage. Once you have determined you have this protection, notify the insurance company that services your flood insurance policy. Keep your policy number handy when you call this company. You can also reach the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) directly at 1-800-621-3362. The FEMA Tips on Filing a Flood Claim Web page gives details on how to file a flood insurance claim. (<http://www.fema.gov/nfip-file-your-claim>)

Flood and wind losses are covered under the personal auto policy or business auto policy as long as you have purchased other-than-collision (formerly called comprehensive) coverage for the vehicle. Check your declarations page or call your agent to determine if you have this coverage, which is typically subject to a deductible.

Impacted people and businesses without flood insurance may be eligible for low-interest loans from the federal government. The US Small Business Administration (SBA) is responsible for providing affordable financial assistance to home owners and renters located in a declared disaster area. Home owners may apply for up to \$200,000 in low-interest loans to repair or replace their primary residence to its predisaster condition. Find more information on the SBA website.

Windstorm Loss:

If you have a windstorm loss, the standard homeowners policy provides additional living expenses, which are often 20 to 30 percent of your dwelling limit. Your insurance company may advance you money to pay for reasonable additional living expenses, but you should keep track of your additional expenses such as hotel rooms, extra transportation costs, and restaurant charges. Unfortunately, if your loss is solely due to floodwaters, additional living expenses are not covered under the flood insurance policy.

For businesses suffering a windstorm loss, a commercial property policy can, and often does, provide coverage for resulting loss of income or increased expenses. However, the flood insurance policy does not provide coverage for business income and expense losses resulting from a covered flood loss. In some cases, coverage for business interruption or extra expense resulting from a flood is added to a nonstandard commercial property policy, even when the flood damage itself is insured under the flood insurance policy. In those cases a relatively high deductible (such as \$100,000) usually applies.

FEMA Assistance:

Note that FEMA does not offer "critical needs assistance." This aid is a one-time \$500 payment per eligible household for those with unmet critical and financial needs. Details are available on FEMA's Critical Needs Assistance program web page. Visit DisasterAssistance.gov to apply for assistance online. If you experience difficulty applying online, you may also call (800) 621-3362/TTY (800) 462-7585 to apply during standard hours of operation (7a.m. to 11p.m. Eastern Time), 7 days a week. You can also check your application status at DisasterAssistance.gov. Survivors have 60-days from the date of a declaration for Individual Assistance to apply for assistance.

Please note that if you are eligible for an Individual Assistance grant you are not required to pay back the grant to FEMA. There is no income threshold for Individual Assistance grants, but you may be referred to the Small Business Administration (SBA) for low interest disaster loan to assist in your recovery. These low interest disaster loans for homeowners and businesses from the SBA must be repaid

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