

## Insurance Tips for Disaster Victims

**Making a claim.** Policyholders should make contact with their insurance company as soon as it is feasible. It is important that your insurer know where you can be reached. Be sure to keep your insurance providers contact information readily available at all times.

**Inventory your belongings.** If the policyholder does not have an inventory, they should promptly start working on an inventory of personal belongings. Make two copies, one for you and one for the insurance adjuster. Make your inventory as complete as possible, including a description of the items, dates of purchase or age, cost at purchase, and estimated replacement cost. Begin gathering available documentation (receipts, photos, video, user manuals, warranties, etc.) related to the property. When it is safe to do so, take photos of the damaged area and property. You need to be prepared to provide your insurer with a description of your damaged property and losses.

**Mitigate your losses.** The policyholder has a responsibility under the terms of their policy to take reasonable and necessary steps to try to prevent further loss. In some cases, this is not practical; when it is safe to do so, homeowners should attempt to make temporary repairs to eliminate or reduce further damage. Be sure to:

- Take ample photos/video of the damage before you make any repairs.
- Obtain and keep receipts and detailed, accurate records of any expenses you can incur resulting from repairs made to your property so that your insurer can reimburse you for reasonable repair expenses.
- Keep receipts for “living expenses” so you can be reimbursed under your “additional living expenses” coverage if you have it.
- Secure a detailed estimate for permanent repairs from a reliable contractor (see tips on avoiding fraud below).

**Paying your premiums.** If mail has been disrupted many people may not have access to their insurance related documentation; if a policyholder believes their premium payment may be due soon, they should take steps to pay their premiums so their coverage does not lapse. Sometimes insurers will extend premium due dates for policyholders in these situations. If you are concerned that your policy might lapse due to non-payment of the premium because of the disaster, call your insurer or your agent to make arrangements.

**Contesting a claim decision.** If a claimant disagrees with the insurance company’s claim settlement offer, there are options.

- Seek assistance from your agent. Inform your agent and the company’s adjusters that you disagree with the offer and provide additional information and documentation to support your position.
- Request an independent appraisal of the loss.

- Research the appropriateness of retaining representation from a qualified, license attorney or adjuster.
- File a complaint with you sates Department of Insurance if you believe the insurer may have violated a state insurance claims law.

**Be alert for fraud.** Unscrupulous people may prey on vulnerable victims of disasters with various fraudulent schemes including, home repair fraud and solicitation of insurance fraud. To avoid being a victim of fraud, follow these steps:

- Be wary of contracts or repairmen that solicit door-to-door. Doing business with licensed and insured contractors gives you protection and options if you do not receive the quality of work for which you contracted.
- Verify the contractor's license by visiting [www.sunbiz.org](http://www.sunbiz.org) or call the Better Business Bureau.
- Shop around before selecting a contractor or repairman. Get more than one written estimate.
- Don't be pressures into signing a contract and never sign a contract with blanks. A contract should include the contractor's name, business name, phone number and address.
- Get everything in writing. A contract should include a thorough description of the work to be performed, the grade and quality of materials to be used, the agreed upon starting and completion dates, the total cost, a payment schedule, warranty terms and the contractor's signature.
- Never let work begin on your home or business until the contract is finalized.
- Insist on getting references and check them.
- Never pay a contractor or repairman in full or sign a certificate of completion until after the work is completed.
- Never let anyone persuade you to seek reimbursement for non-existent or exaggerated losses or damages. This constitutes insurance fraud, which is a felony.

Source: State of Arizona, Department of Insurance