



POST-DISASTER CLAIMS GUIDE



HOW DO I FILE AN **INSURANCE CLAIM**



SAFE AND SOUND

After a disaster hits, make sure you and your family are safe and then secure your belongings. Do what you can to secure your property that is still inside and to prevent damage. For example, if windows are broken, board them up. If the roof has a few holes, cover it with a tarp to prevent water damage.



REPORT A CLAIM

Once you've determined your home is damaged and needs to be repaired or rebuilt, you need to report or file a claim as soon as possible. The easiest way to report a claim is to call your insurance company or agent. You may be able to report or file a claim online or from your cell phone. If you have trouble finding a phone number, try searching for your insurance company through Google.



ESTIMATE DAMAGE

An insurance adjuster will figure out how much damage was done to your home and property. The adjuster will ask you for a home inventory (a list of your personal property) if your personal belongings were damaged or destroyed. The adjuster will visit your home to inspect and estimate the damage done. In this [section](#), you can learn about the different types of adjusters who may work on your claim and what you should do to prepare to meet the adjuster.



DETERMINE COVERAGE

Once the adjuster has figured out how much it will cost to rebuild, repair or replace your home or property, the adjuster then will review your policy to calculate how much the insurance company will pay. If you've never filed a claim before, this process can seem overwhelming. But you can read this [section](#) to learn how claim payments are calculated and how your coverage will impact what your insurance company pays. You can learn what some of the words used by insurance companies mean.



REBUILD, REPAIR AND REPLACE

Your recovery from a disaster is not complete until you are living back in your home. During the recovery phase, you'll be replacing personal items (if damaged), choosing building materials and working with contractors. Read this [section](#) to find tips about working with contractors and how to avoid becoming a victim of fraud.



PREPARE

While you're going through this recovery process, it's the best time to start preparing for the next disaster or claim. Create a home inventory list as you're replacing your belongings. Also as you're rebuilding, you should consider using building materials that will resist damage – so if there's another disaster, your home will have less damage. For example, you could use impact-resistant shingles or impact-resistant siding.

PROPERTY INSURANCE CLAIMS GUIDE

Disasters happen everywhere and can happen at any time.

Any of the following can cause a significant amount of damage to homes and personal property:



TORNADOES



WILDFIRES



HURRICANES



FLOODS



EARTHQUAKE

This might be the first time you have had an insurance claim – or maybe a claim this big. This Guide will help you through this process whether this is your first claim or not.

This guide is designed to help you understand what to do after a natural disaster to recover from your loss. It also gives you helpful tools and tips to navigate the insurance claims process.

Remember that Missouri Department of Insurance is available to help and answer any questions you may have – free of charge.



SAFE AND SOUND

A disaster has hit my area and my home has been damaged. I've made sure my family is safe. What should I do next?

Make sure there are no safety issues like downed electrical lines or broken gas lines. If there are any of those, leave your home and wait for or listen to your local authorities to learn when you can return.

When inspecting your home, avoid broken glass and sharp objects or remove them. Watch out for things that could cause you to trip or fall.

Take photos or videos of the damaged areas and personal property. You also can jot down notes about any significant damage you see.

My family and I were evacuated from our home. When can we go home?

Wait to return to your home until Missouri officials or local authorities tell you it's safe.

In many disasters, the authorities won't let you return to your home if there are hazards like downed power lines or broken gas lines. This is for your safety.

There is a lot of damage to my home. Do I need to do anything about any of the damage?

Try to prevent further damage by making essential repairs, like covering roofs, or windows with plywood, tarp, canvas, or other waterproof materials.

IMPORTANT: KEEP ALL RECEIPTS FOR EMERGENCY REPAIRS TO GIVE TO YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY

Don't make permanent repairs before talking with your insurance agent or insurance company. Your company may not repay you for repairs they didn't authorize.

If you're contacted by any contractors, review the section on [Avoiding Insurance Fraud](#) so that you can avoid being taken advantage of.

There is so much damage to my home, there's no way I can stay. What should I do?

Do your best to secure your home and your personal belongings.

Gather important papers, including your insurance policies and a list of all damaged or destroyed personal property (a home inventory list), if you have one. Take those with you if you can't stay in your home.

If you can't stay in your home, save any hotel receipts. Your insurance company will need the receipts to repay you.

Contact your doctor's office, pharmacy, or health plan if your prescription medicines were lost or if you lost your glasses, contacts, hearing aids, walker, wheelchair, or other medical equipment in the disaster.

Make sure you notify utilities and your mortgage company and make arrangements for mail deliveries.



ADDITIONAL LIVING EXPENSES (ALE)

Most homeowners' policies also will pay the additional expenses you incur – if you can't stay in your home because of damage from a covered disaster. For example, if you have to move into a hotel or apartment while your home is repaired or rebuilt, the insurance company will pay your costs for temporary housing.

Just don't expect the insurance company to pay for your stay at a 5-star spa and resort or that the insurance company will pay for you to eat out every night at the most expensive restaurant in town. ALE is limited; see below for more information.

What types of living expenses does ALE pay for?

The insurance company will not pay ALL of your living expenses. ALE is to help pay those expenses that are beyond your normal expenses because you can't live in your home. For example, ALE coverage will pay hotel lodging, but it won't pay your mortgage payment.

ALE typically covers hotel bills, reasonable restaurant meals (if you're staying in a hotel room with no kitchen), and other living costs above and beyond your normal housing expenses while you can't live in your home because of damage.

You need to be sure you keep ALL receipts for any additional costs you have. The insurance company will need the receipts to reimburse you.

Is there a limit to how long or how much I can use for my additional living expenses?

Keep in mind that ALE coverage is limited. Some policies will have a dollar limit; some also may have a time limitation.

The good news – these limits are separate from any coverage you have available to rebuild or repair your home and are separate from any coverage you have to replace your belongings.

Ask your insurance company or adjuster what your policy covers and any time or dollar limits that may apply.



REPORTING AN **INSURANCE CLAIM**

When should I report property damage to my home or personal property?

Before reporting the property damage to your home, find out what your deductible is. If the damage is minor, for example, just a few shingles were damaged, you might decide you're better off paying for the repairs out of pocket instead of filing an insurance claim.

If you believe the damage will cost more than your deductible to repair, or there is obviously a lot of damage, you may want to file a claim. But, remember that you may not be able to see all the damage. You may want to have a contractor inspect your home. It's important that you notify your insurance company as soon as you know there's damage and you decide to file a claim.

The easiest way to report damage is to call your insurance company or agent directly.

What should I do if I don't have my company or agent's phone number?

If you have cell service, use your cell phone to search for phone numbers or the insurance company's website. There may be a phone number to report a claim.

If you have access to Facebook or Twitter, you can search for information from your insurance company or state department of insurance about how to file a claim.

If you have limited or no cell service, look for mobile claims' centers in your area. Local news outlets and social media usually announce their locations.

What do I need to know when I call to make a claim?

It will help if you have your policy number. But if you don't, your insurance company or agent can find your policy with your name, address, and phone number. You'll need to briefly explain what happened and describe the type and extent of the property damage.

If you aren't staying in your home, be prepared to give your insurance company and agent your new contact information—a phone number and an address.

Let your insurance company and agent know when you call if you've taken photos and videos of the damage and have cost estimates.



What is a contractor?

An individual you hire to manage the repair of your home. The contractor is responsible for supplying the necessary equipment, material, labor and services to complete the repairs.

What do I need to ask when I file a claim?

You should ask:

- For the name and phone number for every person you talk to. For your claim or reference number.
- How long you have to file a claim.
- If you need estimates to make repairs or rebuild before you can file a claim.
- For a general idea of what your policy will cover.
- If your insurance policy covers hotel costs. For how much? For how long?
- For information about your deductible. Are there separate deductibles for hail, hurricane, or wind damage? What are those?
- If there are any special processes or procedures you need to know about.
- When you can expect an adjuster to call.
- What other information the company will need to process the claim.

What other information or paperwork could the insurance company or agent ask for during the claims process?

A list of all damaged or destroyed personal property (a home inventory list), and receipts showing when you bought the damaged or destroyed items, if you have them.

A list of damage to the home and other structures, like a garage, tool shed, or in-ground swimming pool. You'll need this list when you meet with the adjuster.

If you have limited or no cell service, look for mobile claims' centers in your area. Local news outlets and social media usually announce their locations.

What if I don't have a completed home inventory list?

Don't worry; the adjuster will give you some time to make a list. But, ask the adjuster how much time you have to submit this inventory list.

Work from memory if your property was destroyed and you have no records.

Review any photos you may have, for example on your cell phone or from family or friends, taken inside your home. That may help you make the list. Search Amazon, eBay, or other online retailers to help estimate costs.

The National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) has a printable inventory listing that may help you as you're making your list.



https://www.insureuonline.org/home_inventory_checklist.pdf



ESTIMATING THE DAMAGE

What is an adjuster and what does an adjuster do?

An adjuster is a person who will determine the amount of damage to your home and property; what can be repaired or replaced and at what cost. An adjuster will review your insurance policy to determine if the damage is covered and if there are any dollar limits or deductibles that would apply. They should also explain your policy's coverage for the claim.

ARE THERE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ADJUSTERS?



COMPANY



INDEPENDENT



PUBLIC

Remember in larger weather events or disasters, not all adjusters will live or work in Missouri. Some adjusters may be sent from other states to help when there is a large number of claims.



What is a company adjuster?

- A company adjuster works only for that insurance company.
- The insurance company hires and pays a company adjuster. This adjuster will settle the claim based on the insurance coverage you have and the amount of damage to your home and property.
- You do not pay a company adjuster.



What is an independent adjuster?

- An independent adjuster works for several different insurance companies. An insurance company uses independent adjusters when it doesn't have its own adjusters on staff or when it needs more adjusters than it has available; this often happens in a large disaster.
- An independent adjuster does the same work as a company adjuster (see above).
- You do *not* pay an independent adjuster.



What is a public adjuster?

- A public adjuster is a professional you can hire to handle your insurance claim.
- Public adjusters have no ties to the insurance company.
- They appraise the damage to your home and property, review your insurance coverage, and negotiate a settlement of the insurance claim for you.
- Many states require public adjusters to be licensed. But some states may prohibit public adjusters from negotiating insurance claims for you. In those states, only a licensed attorney can represent you.
- You pay have to pay a public adjuster.



WORKING WITH THE **INSURANCE ADJUSTER**

How long after I file a claim will an adjuster come to inspect my home?

It depends – every disaster can be different. Ask your insurance company when you file the claim.

If you don't hear from an adjuster in a reasonable amount of time, contact your agent or the company. A reasonable amount of time could be 3 to 5 days for a minor claim. But, it may take longer for the adjuster to reach you following a large disaster in your area. Be sure they know how to contact you.

What should I do to prepare to meet with the adjuster?

- Make a list of all damaged or destroyed personal property. Make a list of damage to the home and other structures, like a garage, tool shed, or in-ground swimming pool. Work from memory or from photos if you have no records of your destroyed property.
- Gather any photos or videos of your home and property before they were damaged or destroyed.
- Include receipts from when you bought the damaged or destroyed items, if you have them. Search Amazon, eBay, or other online retailers to help estimate costs.
- If you have time before the adjuster inspects your home, try to get written bids from contractors. You aren't required to have bids, but it can help. When getting bids, they should detail the materials to be used, prices of those materials, and labor on a line-by-line basis.
- Take notes when you meet with your adjuster. Get the adjuster's name and contact information and ask when you can expect to hear back. You can write this information down in the Claims Communication Section in the back of this resource.

What will happen when the insurance adjuster comes to my home?

- You should be there when the adjuster comes to your home. You can show the adjuster where you believe there has been structural damage and give the lists you've prepared of property damage or structural damage, photos or videos you've taken, and bids from contractors.
- The adjuster will inspect your home and take photographs and measurements. While the adjuster is there, they may even do some calculations of the damage and cost to repair.
- Before the adjuster leaves, make sure you have their contact information. Ask the adjuster what the next steps will be and for an estimate of when you will hear back from them.
- Ask the adjuster if there is any other information you should provide. After the adjuster leaves, you may need to gather more information or start a personal property inventory list.

If I hire a public adjuster, will the insurance company still send its own adjuster?

The insurance company doesn't have to accept the estimates of your public adjuster.

The insurance company will typically send either a company adjuster or independent adjuster to assess and estimate damage to your home or property.

How is a public adjuster paid?

- If you hire a public adjuster, it's your responsibility to pay their fee.
- Depending on the laws of Missouri, public adjusters can charge a flat fee or a fee that's based on a percentage of the settlement you get from your insurer.
- In some states, the maximum a public adjuster can charge is set by law. The maximum also may vary depending on whether a widespread catastrophe caused your loss.
- A public adjuster should give you a contract. The contract should explain what services the adjuster will provide and how much you will pay.



If you hire a public adjuster after your insurer has made an initial offer, your contract should state if the offer amount is the least you'll be paid after the adjuster takes his fee from the final settlement.

- You should ask your public adjuster to routinely provide you with updates on the status of your claim.



DETERMINING COVERAGE (SETTLING A CLAIM)

How do I get a settlement offer? Who gives me that?

The company adjuster or independent adjuster will calculate the amount of damage to your home and property. They will review your policy and determine what deductibles may apply and if there are any limits on what will be paid. Once they've made those calculations, they'll contact you and your public adjuster or lawyer (if you have one) and share their estimates and calculations with you. They also may contact your contractor about their estimates and calculations.

Will I get a lump sum payment and when will I receive money?

The settlement process is not a single transaction. You'll get a number of payments for different parts of your claim to help you start the rebuilding and repairing process. You'll likely receive a payment for your additional living expenses mentioned above. Then you will start to receive payments to replace your personal property and then for the repairs and construction on your home.

Why did the insurance company make the check payable to me AND my mortgage company?

If you have a mortgage loan on your home, your lender has an interest in making sure the home is rebuilt – or that your loan is paid in full. Your mortgage lender required you to add them as an additional insured on your homeowners' policy. Because of this, the insurer is obligated to include them on the check when paying for major repairs. You'll need to work with your mortgage lender to get the claim money released for repairs. If you have problems working with your mortgage lender, contact the Missouri Division of Finance that regulates banks and mortgage lenders or the Missouri Attorney General's Office for assistance. The federal government also has a website where you can make a complaint against your bank or mortgage lender, if you aren't getting the assistance you need. That website is: <https://www.usa.gov/complaints-lender>. Missouri Department of Insurance also may have suggestions for you.

How long will it take for my insurance claim to be settled?

Everyone wants the process to be done as fast as possible so they can return to a normal life.

If there's substantial damage involving your home and property, an insurance claim is not going to be closed with a single payment. There will be claims payments for various parts of your claim as the rebuilding process moves along. Most people find it takes at least 18 to 24 months to repair/rebuild their home and replace their possessions after a major disaster. Your insurance claim will remain open until all payments you're entitled to under your policy have been paid.

You should feel free to contact your insurance company or adjuster for a status on your claim at any time during the claims process.

What if I'm not satisfied with the amount of my insurance settlement?

- Your settlement won't necessarily be the same as your neighbor's. Your coverages, deductibles, and policy limits may be different even if the damage looks the same.
- If the insurance company denies any part of the claim, ask for the denial in writing. Keep all paperwork.
- If you don't believe the offer is fair, call the insurance company. Be prepared to explain why you think the offer is unfair. If you're not satisfied with the response, contact the Missouri Department of Insurance.

What if the insurance company doesn't agree with the public adjuster's or my contractor's estimate of the damage?

Differences in construction estimates are common. Ideally, you and the insurance company should reach agreement on a "scope of loss". This is a detailed list of the quantities of construction materials, the trades, labor, profit and overhead, building code compliance and every single item required to repair or rebuild your home.

If you've submitted all the information that your insurance company needs to pay your dwelling claim, including written estimates from contractors, but you and your insurance company are still far apart on the claim amount, there are three different ways outside of filing a lawsuit to resolve or settle the difference between you and your insurance company.

Appraisal: Some insurance policies what is called an appraisal clause. If your policy has an appraisal clause, you must go through the appraisal process before you can sue your insurance company. If you and your insurance company disagree about a value on a particular claim, then the appraisal clause gives you an informal way to resolve any differences. Appraisal is an informal process and it is not binding. The costs for an appraisal are paid by you and your insurance company.

Mediation: Mediation is a process of resolving an insurance dispute with the help of an independent third party (a mediator). During mediation, both you and your insurance company give information to the mediator. But, the mediator won't make a decision about what will be paid. The mediator's job is to take the information from both sides, identify the issues and help everyone come to a compromise. Mediations are confidential, but if an agreement is reached, a Settlement Agreement is signed and filed with a court of law. It is then a binding agreement between you and your insurance company. The costs for mediation are shared by you and your insurance company.

Arbitration: Arbitration is the process of settling a dispute through a legal proceeding without taking it to a court of law. Some insurance policies will require arbitration and other policies will contain an arbitration clause explains how the arbitration will be handled if both you and your insurance company agree to use arbitration.

In an arbitration, both you and your insurance company will attend a formal meeting with a third neutral party known as an arbitrator. Each party presents their information to the arbitrator and agrees to accept the decision of the arbitrator, known as an award. In most cases, arbitration awards are binding, which means you can't go to court and appeal or dispute the award of the arbitrator.

What can I do if my claim was denied?

If your claim was denied, the **appraisal clause won't help you**. Appraisal is only for determining the cost of the repairs, not to determine if the repairs are covered under your policy.

If you disagree with your insurance company about whether or not something is covered, you may want to use mediation, arbitration or file a lawsuit against your insurance company. But, before you do any of those, contact Missouri Department of Insurance for help.



HOW IS A CLAIM PAYMENT AMOUNT CALCULATED?

There are a number of important insurance terms you need to know to better understand how your insurance claim will be paid. Terms like deductibles, depreciation, Actual Cash Value and Replacement Cost are explained in the following sections.

What is a deductible?

A deductible is the part or amount of the claim you're responsible for. Insurance companies will deduct this amount from any claim settlement amounts they pay to you or on your behalf. So if your insurance policy has a \$1,000 deductible, that means you have agreed to pay \$1,000 out of your pocket for the damage to your home.

Are there different deductibles?

Yes. A deductible can be either a specific dollar amount or a percentage of the total amount of insurance. There are special deductibles that apply to certain types of claims; some deductibles are applied to specific parts of your home. You can learn about the deductibles for your policy by looking at the declarations page or the front page of most homeowners' insurance policies.

HOW ARE DEDUCTIBLES USED IN CALCULATING MY CLAIM?

FLAT DOLLAR DEDUCTIBLE \$500 DEDUCTIBLE PER LOSS

A disaster destroyed your home. Your home was insured for \$250K (structure only) and it will cost \$250K to rebuild it. You have a \$500 deductible.

Damage and Cost to Rebuild: \$250,000

Minus the Deductible: - 500

Claim Settlement Amount: \$249,500

PERCENTAGE DEDUCTIBLE 2% DEDUCTIBLE PER LOSS

A disaster destroyed your home. Your home was insured for \$250K (structure only) and it will cost \$250K to rebuild it. You have a 2% deductible.

Insured Value: \$250,000

2% Deductible: $\$250,000 \times 2\% = \$5,000$

Damage and Cost to Rebuild: \$250,000

Minus the Deductible: - 5,000

Claim Settlement Amount: \$245,000

Some insurance policies have special deductibles for losses caused by wind, hurricanes, or other types of storms that are applied when the damage is caused by one of those types of disasters. If your home is damaged by something else, then the "all peril" deductible would apply.

Some policies also may have a special deductible that applies to a specific part of your home, like your roof. In these cases, these deductibles could be either a flat dollar amount or a percentage.

REPLACEMENT COST VERSUS ACTUAL CASH VALUE

If you have **Replacement Cost Value (RCV)** coverage, your policy will pay the cost to repair or replace your damaged property without deducting for depreciation.

If you have **Actual Cash Value (ACV)** coverage, your policy will pay the depreciated cost to repair or replace your damaged property.

You should check the declarations page of your homeowners' policy to see whether the policy provides replacement cost coverage. If it does not specify replacement cost, then your policy likely only covers actual cash value. If it specifies replacement cost, then you have replacement cost coverage. Under an RCV or ACV policy, your dwelling coverage pays for damage to the structure and will pay only up to the policy limit.

Even if you bought an RCV policy, there may be other limits on what the policy will pay for damage to certain surfaces, such as roofs. In some cases, the policy may pay ACV on your roof, but RCV on the rest of your home and property. If you have questions, ask the adjuster or call your insurer to determine what type of coverage you have.

Example:

The Smiths and the Johnsons are next door neighbors. Their homes are exactly the same size, built in the same year and have the exact same floorplan.

One night, a terrible storm tears through their town, completely destroying the Smith's and the Johnson's roofs. Both roofs have the same damage. The Smiths and the Johnsons have a \$1,000 deductible, and both roofs will cost \$15,000 to replace. The Smiths have a replacement cost policy, while the Johnsons have an actual cash value policy.



SMITH'S REPLACEMENT COST VALUE

Insurance valuation method: RCV

Cost of Smith's roof ten years ago: \$15,000

Policy deductible: \$1,000

Cost of repairs to roof: \$15,000

Depreciation not applicable for RCV

Insurance payment:

\$15,000 repair cost

– \$0 depreciation (no depreciation with RCV)

– \$1,000 deductible

= \$14,000 insurance payment



JOHNSON'S ACTUAL CASH VALUE

Insurance valuation method: ACV

Cost of Johnson's roof ten years ago: \$15,000

Policy deductible: \$1,000

Cost of repairs to roof: \$15,000

Depreciation schedule: \$1,000/year

Insurance payment:

\$15,000 repair cost

– \$10,000 depreciation (\$1000/yr x 10 years)

– \$1,000 deductible

= \$4,000 insurance payment

HOW DOES DEPRECIATION WORK?

IS ALL DEPRECIATION THE SAME?

No. Depreciation in an insurance claim is much different than depreciation on assets for taxes and is different than how an accountant calculates depreciation on property.

In an insurance claim, the amount deducted for depreciation may be significant, especially if the damaged property was at or near the end of its useful life. For example, if your 20-year-old roof is destroyed by a covered cause of loss and must be replaced, the policy that pays RCV will cover the full cost to replace the roof. However, an ACV policy may pay as little as 20% of the cost to replace the roof, since the useful life of a roof is usually about 25 years.

WHAT IS “DEPRECIATION” AND HOW DOES THAT AFFECT MY CLAIM?

Everything covered under your homeowners’ policy is assigned a value. Your home, and most of its contents and components, are likely to decline in value over time because of age or wear and tear. This loss in value is known as depreciation.

Depreciation usually is calculated based on the condition of the property when it was lost or damaged, what a new one would cost, and how long the item would normally last. For example, your two-year old home computer that was in good condition was destroyed in a disaster. A similar new computer would cost \$750. Your home computer normally lasts four years, so it had lost 50% of its value (25% a year). So, the value of your home computer at the time it was destroyed was half of \$750, or \$375. So, your insurance settlement would include \$375 reimburse you for this home computer.

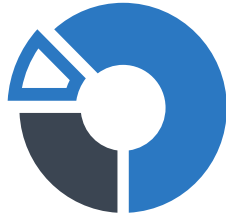
$$\text{\$750} - \text{\$375} = \text{\$375}$$

Cost of new laptop
(Replacement cost value)

50% depreciation
(2 years x 25% per year)

Value of your laptop
(Actual cash value)





I have a replacement cost policy, but my insurance company only paid for part of the claim. Can they do that?

When you have an RCV policy and turn in a claim for a covered loss, the insurer initially may pay only the ACV for the damage to your home or your personal property. But, when you present evidence that the damaged property has been repaired or replaced, the insurer will pay the difference (referred to as “recoverable depreciation”) up to the replacement cost.

Recoverable depreciation is calculated as the difference between an item's replacement cost and ACV.



Is there a time limit on when I can get paid for the recoverable depreciation?

Yes, there's usually a time limit. That time limit can range from 6 months to up to one year, depending on Missouri laws and your policy.

In certain circumstances, like a very large-scale disaster, insurance companies know it will take longer to rebuild homes and replace property. They will either give you more time – if you ask or the Department of Insurance may require the insurance company to give you more time.

If you have any questions about this time frame, ask your adjuster. You also can contact the Department of Insurance.

I was told I have to replace with “like kind and quality”. What does that mean?

Most insurance policies that are Replacement Cost cover repairs or replacements with property of “like kind and quality”.

Your insurance policy isn't intended to pay for expensive improvements or upgrades. For example, if you had a 3-tab shingle roof before the loss, your insurance policy would cover the cost of another 3-tab shingle roof, but not a more expensive slate roof. If you had ceramic bathroom sinks in your home, your insurance policy won't pay the extra cost to replace those with granite countertops.

What is “Functional Replacement”?

Another type of coverage becoming more common, particularly with older homes, is known as “Functional Replacement Coverage” (FRC). FRC replaces the damaged property with a functional replacement, which isn't necessarily the same quality and craftsmanship as the original materials.

A simple example would be replacing plaster walls with drywall. Both provide solid walls and have the same function, yet the cost varies greatly between the two. Another example would be a damaged banister in a home. The repair could be made with wood carved in the same architectural style, but a less expensive wood is used – for instance, replacing an oak banister with a pine banister.



My adjuster mentioned that some of my property has a special limit. What is that?

A special limit caps how much money you'll be paid in a claim for certain types of property. Don't confuse this with the contents or personal property limits. A special limit will apply to specific categories of property like jewelry, furs, guns, antiques, collector items, and coins.



My home and/or property were destroyed and can't be repaired. Can I use the insurance settlement to build or buy another home somewhere else?

Check your insurance policy and talk with your agent or company. You can also call the Department of Insurance.

You may not get the same settlement if you don't rebuild on the same location.



WHAT IS ORDINANCE AND LAW COVERAGE?

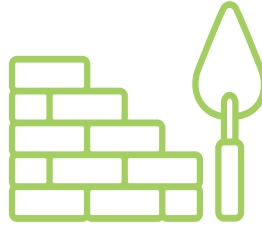
- In many instances, your local government may require your home to be repaired or rebuilt to meet current local building codes. Unless you have Ordinance and Law coverage, a standard homeowners policy doesn't cover that added expense.
- Ordinance and Law coverage in your homeowners insurance policy covers part or all of the cost to repair or rebuild your home to meet current local building codes. For example, updated electrical wiring, plumbing, windows, and roofing materials are some things that may need to be updated.
- Standard homeowners policies don't cover the added expense to meet current building codes when you repair or replace your home. Look at the declarations page of your policy to see if you have Ordinance and Law coverage.



THE THREE “R’S” OF **RECOVERY**



REBUILD



REPAIR



REPLACE

I've accepted the insurance company's settlement and I'm ready to repair/rebuild. What do I need to know?

- Use reputable contractors. Reputable contractors usually don't ask for a large payment upfront.
- Contractors may be licensed or registered. The difference is important. A licensed contractor has passed exams and met other requirements to show that he or she is competent. A registered contractor has provided contact information to a government authority. You can learn more about licensing and registration of contractors at www.homeadvisor.com
- Ask your contractor to show you the building permits. Contractors most likely will need to apply and pay for building permits before beginning work. And, don't forget to check with your local officials for any requirements on permits or inspections.
- Get an estimate from more than one contractor. An estimate from a contractor that is much lower than any of the others could be a warning sign.
- Contact your insurance company and adjuster any time you find damage that hasn't already been reported or inspected or if you learn something new about damage to your home or property.

What should I know about a contractor before hiring one?

Get the following information:

- a copy of the contractor's identification (the contractor's name and the name of the business);
- a copy of the contractor's business license (check the expiration date);
- a copy of the contractor's proof of worker's compensation insurance; and
- a copy of the contractor's proof of liability insurance. A licensed insurance agent or company issues this certificate. The proof of insurance should show the company's name, phone number, and the policy number. Call the insurance company to verify the coverage.



ASSIGNMENT OF **BENEFITS**

Some states allow assignments of benefits (AOB) after a loss. This agreement transfers your rights under your insurance policy and your claim to a third party, most often your contractor.

Be cautious if you're asked to sign an AOB. Typically, there's a promise from the contractor to handle all matters with the insurance company for you, which may sound great. But you also may be giving up some, most, or even all of your rights, including having a lawsuit filed without your approval or knowledge. Take your time to review any AOB carefully. Speak with your claims adjuster or have an attorney review and give you advice.



WHAT CAN I DO TO AVOID **INSURANCE FRAUD?**

After storms and other disasters, fraudsters, and scam artists often arrive quickly. Watch for contractors who offer to do your repairs with upgraded or free building materials. Here are just a few tips to help you avoid becoming a victim of a disaster fraudster or scam artist:

- If you're working with contractors you don't know, find out where they're from. Many fraudsters will travel from state to state.
- Before you sign any contracts or pay any money, ask for references.
- Never pay the full amount before the work is complete.
- Ask your local Better Business Bureau and state Attorney General's Office about complaints.
- Check websites like Angie's List or HomeAdvisor.com to see if the contractor has a profile.
- Most importantly, report any suspected fraud to your insurance agent and the Department of Insurance as soon as possible.



MOVING ON & **LOOKING FORWARD**

I've just gone through one disaster. What do I need to do to prepare for the next disaster?

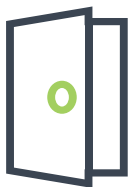
There are two different parts of preparation – preparing your home and the other is preparing yourself financially.

Preparing your home

While you are rebuilding, consider what you can do to minimize damage to your home during the next storm or disaster. This is called mitigation.

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER TO MITIGATE FUTURE DAMAGE:

Make modifications or improvements to your home to limit damage during a tornado, hurricane, or high wind. Some things that you can do are:



Secure entry doors. Make sure entry doors have a two-inch deadbolt and three hinges with screws long enough to secure the door and frame to the wall. The frame should be well anchored.



Brace your garage door. You can buy bracing products that will make your door stronger and more wind resistant. If you're expecting bad weather and haven't braced your garage door, you can put a vertical brace into the wall framing and floor, much as you would board up a window before a hurricane.



Install impact-resistant windows. Local building codes in some areas require this.

Leave the windows closed in a storm. Opening the window doesn't equalize the pressure between the inside and outside of the house. Instead, it makes the inside of the house become pressurized, like blowing up a balloon until it pops. The air pushes off the roof or a wall and the house collapses.



Install wind-resistant roof structures. Roofs attached with roofing nails inserted at an angle, but this type of roof can come right off in a high wind. Using hurricane clips to attach roofs creates a stronger connection between the roof and the house. Roofing clips come in a range of protection; the one you need depends on the weight of your roof. The building code in hurricane-prone areas require roofing clips, but they're a good idea in tornado-prone areas too.



Remove weeds, brush and vegetation. You can create a wildfire defense area for your home by removing flammable materials. Trim over hanging branches. Removed dead trees and bushes.



Clean gutters and clear them of leaves and pine needles.



Store firewood and other flammable materials away from home, garage or deck.

There are a number of great resources available online that can give you additional ideas or information on ways you can reduce or avoid damage to your home.

- [Ready.gov \(US Department of Homeland Security\)](#)
- [FEMA Mitigation Resources \(US Department of Homeland Security\)](#)
- [Ready, Set Go! \(Wildfire resiliency\)](#)

PREPARING YOURSELF FINANCIALLY

Once you have rebuilt or repaired your home, and you're replacing damaged property, it's time to think about your financial preparation. Here are some things to think about or to work on so that you're prepared for the next disaster:

- You should make a list of all your stuff, called an inventory list. If you don't want to write everything down or type it into a spreadsheet, you can film a video to show your household items. As you film, you can describe important items, including when you bought the item, its condition, and how much you paid for it, if you know. There are also many mobile apps that will make an inventory list easier to create. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners (the NAIC) has a free app called the MyHOME Scr.APP.book that can be downloaded in the [Apple App Store](#) or on [Google Play](#).
- Make a copy of your inventory list and keep it with your insurance policy. You could put the copy somewhere safe, such as a bank safety deposit box. You also could store a copy online.
- Put your insurance company name, policy number, and company contact information somewhere you could find it in a disaster.
- Review your policy with your insurance agent each year to see if your needs have changed.



CLAIM INFORMATION

Name of Insurance Company:

Claim Number:

Phone Number:

INSURANCE ADJUSTER INFORMATION

Adjuster Name:

Adjuster Company:

Phone Number:

Adjuster License Number:

Website:

CONTRACTOR (S)

Name of Company:

Representative:

Phone Number:

License Number:

I checked:

with Ins. Company

Liability Ins.

BBB

Angie's List

Home Advisor

Name of Company:

Representative:

Phone Number:

License Number:

I checked:

with Ins. Company

Liability Ins.

BBB

Angie's List

Home Advisor



CLAIM COMMUNICATION LOG

Who did I talk to:

Name of Company:

Date/Time:

What we talked about:

What is Next:

Who did I talk to:

Name of Company:

Date/Time:

What we talked about:

What is Next:

Who did I talk to:

Name of Company:

Date/Time:

What we talked about:

What is Next:

Who did I talk to:

Name of Company:

Date/Time:

What we talked about:

What is Next:



EMERGENCY REPAIR LOG

To help you keep track of any emergency repairs, here are some forms to help you.

Repair:
Cost of Repair:
Date of Repair:

Repair:
Cost of Repair:
Date of Repair:

Repair:
Cost of Repair:
Date of Repair:

Repair:
Cost of Repair:
Date of Repair:

Repair:

Cost of Repair:

Date of Repair:

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Cost of Repair:

Date of Repair:

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Cost of Repair:

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Cost of Repair:

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