



Storm Survival

Preparedness Tips for Hurricane Season

HURRICANE SEASON starts at the beginning of June and lasts until the end of November. The Insurance Information Institute has special programs for helping people in affected areas.

There are experts who speak both Spanish and English available to discuss insurance issues, disaster preparedness and other topics.

The 2018 hurricane season is shaping up to be near- or above-normal – though not to the degree seen last year, when three major hurricanes struck U.S. soil, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Insurance considerations

Most standard home insurance policies on the Gulf Coast exclude damage from windstorm and hail and all exclude damage from flood. Separate policies for these coverages are needed.

The Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA) offers windstorm

coverage in Texas' First Tier coastal counties and certain areas located in Harris County east of Hwy 146.

FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) offers flood coverage. There are a few private insurance companies offering windstorm and flood coverage for structures that qualify.

Prepping for hurricane season

The first step is reviewing insurance coverage.

For example, a couple may have spent \$50,000 on improvements and remodeling since the policy was created. It is important to discuss these improvements with an agent. The agent will add any specific new inclusions to the policy to ensure adequate compensation if a hurricane causes extensive damage.

Also, it is important to declare valuable jewelry, art, furs and firearms.

These high-end items can easily be damaged during a severe hurricane.

However, they require specific coverage.

The next step is preparing the property and emergency plans.

See 'Plans' on page 2

GIA is pleased to bring you the first edition of our agency newsletter.

We value your business and appreciate the confidence you've shown in us. Our goal is to provide excellent service, competitive pricing, and products tailored to meet the special needs of our clients.

We hope the articles in this and future editions provide insight into an array of insurance subjects, and we urge you to contact us with questions and comments. While we will be focusing on Personal Lines topics and issues, we will include articles of general insurance interest from time to time.

GIA is a full-service Independent Insurance Agency with dedicated departments for Personal and Commercial coverage including Life and Health.



If you have a coverage question, please call us at:

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Understanding Your Policy Exclusions

LIKE MOST people, you're no doubt overwhelmed by the amount of fine print that your insurance policy has.

The main reason for the fine print is to lay out in detail what the insurance company will cover in case of a claim, and what it won't. It's important that you go through this with us and that you especially understand the section called "Exclusions."

Exclusions

Exclusions are provisions in a policy describing losses that the policy will not cover.

For example, a homeowner's policy does not cover losses caused by the use of cars.

While it may appear that the insurer includes these provisions to get out of paying claims, the reasons are more complex and less insidious than that. There are very sensible reasons why no insurance policy covers everything.

First, not every person has the same exposures to loss. For example, you likely don't own a tractor as a homeowner, while the owner of a tractor – doing work for a company with say 15 employees – may operate out of a building they occupy but do not own.

Because there are so many contingencies, insurers try to create policies that cover expected and average scenarios. And they learn over time what they should cover and what they should not.

Getting specialty coverage

Standard insurance policies do not cover every possibility. Policyholders with additional needs usually can purchase additional coverage in the form of a rider or endorsement.

For example, some homeowner's policies do not cover damage caused by water backing up from an overflowing sump or drain.

The uninsurable

The more coverage a policy provides, the higher the premium. Without exclusions, people would be forced to pay for coverage they do not need.

Exclusions keep the premium affordable.

One typical exclusion is for acts of war or terrorism. Armed conflict with another country or a full-scale terrorist attack could cause huge losses beyond the abilities of insurance companies to pay.

Because every household's circumstances are different, standard policies might not provide all the coverage necessary.

For example, if you live in a flood plain, you should also purchase flood insurance along with your homeowner's coverage.

And if you have specific liabilities or assets that may not be covered, you would likely need to talk to us about a policy endorsement.

If you think you may have specific insurance needs like this, don't hesitate to give us a call.



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Plans Should Include Evacuation, Emergency Cash

Preparing for a hurricane

- Keep several weeks worth of canned goods, dry foods and water.
- Keep enough extra essential medication to last for a month.
- Draft evacuation plans, and designate a family meeting place.
- Install hurricane shutters immediately.
- Keep tools, medical supplies and a flashlight in a safe place.
- Keep some emergency cash in a locked safe.
- Have enough batteries to power necessary devices for a month.
- Purchase solar chargers for laptops and mobile phones.
- Buy several efficient battery lamps.
- If evacuation orders are issued, always comply with them.

Getting out

Everything that must be brought along should be packed and ready to go before orders are issued.

Watch the weather forecast every day, and be prepared to possibly leave or take shelter in a safe place.

People who live in apartments or unsafe homes without secure rooms should arrange to stay with a friend or neighbor during a storm if there are no evacuation orders.

Homeowners should board up their doors and windows when necessary. ❖

How to Take the Ultimate Home Inventory

WOULD YOU be able to list everything that was damaged, destroyed or lost in your house or apartment if you had to file a claim with your insurance company?

Trying to remember everything as you are dealing with the mental trauma of your abode being destroyed is not an easy task. You would have a thousand things on your mind, like finding your most important personal documents and family heirlooms, in addition to trying to arrange a place to live.

But you can avoid potential distress – and the risk of your insurer disputing the claim – by preparing a detailed home inventory.

More than 75% of U.S. homeowners don't have an inventory, according to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners. And of those who do have one, they generally don't keep their records up to date.

Having a home inventory can make filing a claim much easier, and it increases the chances the getting the claim paid, too. Also, if you prepare an inventory it will help you assign value to your possessions, which in turn can help you and the insurer decide how much insurance you actually need.

It may sound like a daunting task to just get started, but fortunately TWS Home Inventory and Asset Management Group has created this handy list to help you take stock of your stuff.

Read your policy and discuss it with us

You need to understand your policy so you can know if you are you covered for the replacement value of your possessions or only actual cash value, or whether you need any special riders or endorsements for specialty items, such as:

- Jewelry,
- Musical instruments,
- Firearms,
- Expensive sporting goods like scuba gear or golf clubs.

Take photos of the outside of the home

Shoot the property from all sides, including any landscaping, outdoor furniture and accouterments.

Take photos of each room from all angles

Make sure that your pictures cover every piece of furniture, art and other decorations in every room.

Open every closet, cupboard and drawer

Go through all the places that you keep your possessions and, if you find anything of value, document it. Document when and where you got it and how much you paid for it.

If you haven't gotten in the habit of doing so, keep receipts for all of your big purchases.

Don't forget to photograph and document your clothes. If you have any expensive items, like fur coats, business suits or fancy dresses, take separate photos of them.

Note the model, serial number of electronic items

Take pictures and list the details of computers, mobile phones, tablets, TVs, stereo systems, etc.

Pay extra attention to china, crystal and silver

If you have a fancy set of china and cutlery, place it all on a table and take a picture. Take pics of the front and back of your plates, to show the brand name and the pattern.

Cover the garage as well

Often people have more valuables in their garage than any other place in their home. Again take pictures of everything in there – your tools, equipment, sporting goods, bikes, etc.

Photograph family heirlooms

Include rare items you have inherited when taking pictures. Even though insurance can't replace the sentimental value, it may replace the cost of those items.

Scan all receipts

Get into the habit of scanning your receipts and taking a picture of the item to keep with your receipt. Keep things organized with one folder for each room.

Keep copy of inventory off-premises

You should have a home inventory at home, but also keep one off your premises. These days that's quite easy, since you can store it on the cloud with a free service like dropbox.com. ❖



Filing a Hurricane Insurance Claim

PEOPLE ARE often left reeling from the terrible costs of hurricanes. Homes, businesses and vehicles will have been damaged or destroyed and, after ensuring the safety of your family, the next step is often filing your insurance claim.

To get the best settlement for your claim, document your losses well. Here are the things to keep in mind as you navigate the process of filing a hurricane-related insurance claim.

1. Safety first

First of all, stay safe. Don't try to enter your home if it is not safe to do so. More Americans die in the aftermath of a hurricane than during the storm itself.

Ensure your home is structurally sound and your property free of downed power lines before attempting to reoccupy it.

If your home is not yet safe to re-enter, your insurance company may send adjustors to assess damage and release an advance payment that will enable you to get a contractor in to begin repairing the damage, pending your full claim.

2. Notify your agent

Contact us as soon as possible, to explain the damage and initiate the claims process.

3. Prevent further damage

Take immediate action, if necessary, to prevent or mitigate further damage. For example, shut off broken water lines or gas lines, board up broken windows and get a tarp on damaged roofs.

Any major tear-outs or renovations beyond damage-control measures must be approved by your insurance adjustor. Keep receipts for all expenditures you incur to get these repairs done.

Check your policy, as many will limit how much you can be reimbursed for these types of repairs.

4. Call the right insurer

You may be dealing with multiple insurance carriers for the same event.

For example, if a tree falls on your house, your claim is likely covered by your standard homeowner's insurance policy.

If you have groundwater flood damage, you'll have to file your claim via the National Flood Insurance Program if you have flood insurance.

Similarly, in some areas, you may need windstorm or hurricane insurance to cover your home against wind damage.

If you have damage to your automobile, then your auto insurance company will handle the claim. Generally, you'll need to be carrying comprehensive coverage in order to get reimbursed for a hurricane or flood loss.

Filing your claim

- Take photos, and write down serial numbers and other identifying information. If you have had anything appraised, locate that document and forward it to your adjustor.
- Store damaged property until the adjustor sees it.
- Do not discard any damaged property before the adjustor documents it, unless ordered to do so by law enforcement.
- Get your own contractors' estimates for repairs, and show them to your adjustor, especially if you get a settlement offer that is unreasonably low.
- Do not begin any repairs, except for those measures obviously required to prevent further damage, without authorization from the insurance company, or it may not cover the cost.
- Keep all receipts for lodging, gas and food if you are forced to evacuate your home. Your insurance may cover costs of evacuating, as well as cost of alternative lodging. ❖

