



Insurance Checklist for Disasters

Your BBB offers the following suggestions to help homeowners who find themselves repairing or rebuilding their homes following wildfires or other disasters.

- Contact your insurance adjuster immediately. Not only does this get the ball rolling on the claims process, but you might be eligible for loss-of-use benefits that might include hotel costs, food and other living expenses while your house is unlivable. Be sure to document all conversations with your insurance company or the adjuster and get any promises for reimbursements in writing. Keep all receipts.
- Start researching current replacement costs for items included in your claim rather than depend solely on historical costs.
- Document damage to your property and possessions thoroughly; take pictures or video, if possible. Go from room to room or document all debris piles and create a detailed account of your belongings and losses.
- Because you could be found liable for damage that occurs after the fact, make temporary repairs such as boarding up broken windows, removing wet drywall and carpet to prevent mold and putting up a tarp over a leaky roof.
- Beware of fly-by-night contractors who may offer these services for exorbitant fees. Be sure to get quotes in writing in advance or seek out volunteer groups in your area that may be offering assistance for free.
- Do not make permanent repairs until you get approval from your insurance company. Make sure you understand how your homeowner's insurance company will reimburse your repair costs. Before spending money, call your insurance company first to make sure all necessary procedures are followed according to your policy.
- If your home is unlivable, contact your utility company to turn off your water, gas and or electric services.
- Beware of contractors who claim to be insurance claim specialists and ask you to sign an agreement to allow them to contact your insurance company and seek approval of repairs. Many unscrupulous businesses have tricked consumers into signing a work estimate that automatically commits them to a contract with their business if the claim is approved.
- Check out any contractors you consider hiring at www.bbb.org. Also, make sure they are approved by your insurance company before entering an agreement. Ask to see proof of their licensing and current certificate of insurance. If you hire an uninsured and unlicensed contractor and a serious injury were to occur to the contractor, you, as the person that hired them, could potentially be liable for paying the workers' compensation benefits. This could turn a simple \$1,000 repair into a bill for tens of thousands more. In addition, a neighboring property, a passerby or other property that is negligently damaged by an unlicensed contractor can become a liability to the person that hired the contractor.
- Don't hand over an insurance check to a contractor for repairs prior to work being started. A good rule of thumb is to never give more than one-third of the job price upfront and make sure that your insurance company has approved all repairs before your final payment is given to the business.

Start with Trust. For more trustworthy consumer tips or to find a BBB Accredited insurance providers or contractors, visit www.bbb.org or call 509-455-4200.