

# **Before & After** ***The Disaster***

**Utah Insurance Department**



**Be prepared for natural disasters  
and know what to do after they happen**



## Before the Disaster Hits

No area is completely safe from the possibility of a natural disaster. You can get specific information about what to expect in your community and how to prepare by contacting your local American Red Cross. Or go online at <http://www.redcross.org/>. Information is also available at <http://BeReady.utah.gov>.

After you put together a family disaster plan to address personal safety issues, you will want to give some thought to protecting your investment in your home and property. Here are some tips from the Utah Insurance Department.

- Review your insurance policies to see if you have adequate coverage. If you're not sure, talk to your agent or call the Utah Insurance Department at (801)538-8035 or (800)439-3805. Insurance experts suggest you contact local contractors in your area to get an idea about rebuilding costs. Also, keep in mind you may have to bring your home up to current building codes rather than just restoring it "the way it was." Ask your agent if your policy will pay for the additional expense of bringing it up to code.
- Keep policies and other important papers together in an easily accessible safe place.
- Inventory your personal property including model and serial numbers and purchase information. Do not overlook items you use seasonally or infrequently. You can find an electronic inventory program at <http://www.insureuonline.org/index.htm> and a PDF document at <http://insurance.utah.gov/docs/Household-Inventory.pdf>.
- Back up your inventory by videotaping and /or photographing each room in your house and storing this visual record outside of your home.
- Make copies of insurance policies, your household inventory and other important papers and send them to a trusted friend or family member who lives outside your area.
- In your disaster supply kit include cameras and extra videotape or film (or disposable cameras) and a notebook and pens for use in documenting your losses.
- Include the phone numbers of your insurance agent, your insurance company's local claims office, and home office, in your list of emergency numbers.

## Frequently Asked Questions About Floods & Earthquakes

### **My homeowner's policy does not cover flood damage. How do I get this coverage?**

Flood insurance is available from the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). If your community participates in this program, you can purchase flood insurance regardless of your degree of risk. You can purchase NFIP insurance from a local agent or call 888-379-9531 for more information. The average flood insurance policy is affordable, certainly less expensive than a disaster loan. There is a 30-day waiting period before coverage goes into effect, so plan ahead if you are interested in obtaining this coverage.

### **I have coverage in case of an earthquake. How is my deductible calculated?**

In Utah the deductible for earthquake insurance may vary from insurer to insurer. Currently insurers charge anywhere from 5-15% of the value of the property being insured. For example, if your home is valued at \$150,000 and you have a deductible of 10%, you would be responsible for the first \$15,000 in earthquake damages. If the damages to your home are less than \$15,000 then you would pay the entire amount for home repairs and your insurance company would pay nothing.



## Tips On Surviving The Elements

- Before the disaster arrives, create an emergency stockpile of bottled water, non-perishable food, blankets, candles, matches, flashlights, batteries, AM/FM radio, a three-day supply of any medications you need along with other items you feel are necessary.
- Prevent frozen pipes. Water pipes that are wrapped with insulation and/or heat tape have proven to be effective in preventing frozen pipes. Leave faucets inside your home slightly dripping. Open any cabinets where pipes might be found so the heat from your home can keep them warm.
- Check for drafts. Doors and windows should be checked for drafts. Applying weather stripping to door jams along with covering windows with plastic will keep heat inside the home and save money on heating bills.

## Get Prepared: Review and Update Your Insurance

To begin a review, start with your home inventory. Creating an inventory and storing it in a safe location away from home is one of the most basic – and effective – disaster preparedness steps you can take to help protect yourself and your financial future. A home inventory can save you time and headaches when filing a claim following a disaster.

It is important to review your inventory each year. Remember to note the make, model, serial number, purchase price and date of purchase of any new items and keep copies of receipts for major purchases with your inventory. If you've purchased or have been given jewelry and/or art, make sure to have it appraised. And, don't forget to take photos and/or video of the new items. Once you have a complete home inventory, talk with your insurance agent or company to make sure you're not under- or over-insured.

Also, make sure you know whether your policy includes coverage for replacement cost or actual cash value in case of a loss. Actual cash value (ACV) is the amount it would take to repair damage to your home or to replace its contents after allowing for depreciation. Replacement cost is the amount it would take to rebuild or replace your home and its contents with similar quality materials or goods, without deducting for depreciation.

Store copies of your insurance policies with your inventory in a safe location, away from your home, so these records can be easily retrieved in the event of a loss. Most families have life, automobile, and homeowners or renter's insurance policies. Some families may also have a flood insurance policy or other types of policies. Before you store the insurance policies, review them to verify that they meet your needs. Make sure you know your policy limits, deductibles, exclusions and policyholder claim notification requirements, before disaster strikes.

Keep a list of contact details for your insurance agent and/or company with your policies. Include office phone numbers, mailing addresses Web site addresses and all of your policy numbers for quick reference.

## ***After the Disaster***

A few words about safety – never try to re-enter your home or attempt any repairs unless it is safe to do so. Watch for broken power lines, shattered glass, splintered wood or sharp protruding objects and slick spots. Don't use electrical appliances that have been exposed to water unless they've been checked by a technician.

### **Contact your insurance company as soon as possible.**

Call your agent, the company's toll-free number or get in touch with the company's representatives in the area. The local operations center/disaster information center should be aware of what companies have teams in the area, their locations or contact information. Typically, announcements will be made on the radio and in newspapers.

### **What Happens Next**

The insurance company will send a claims adjuster to look at the damaged property and talk to you about your loss. A claims adjuster is a person professionally trained to assess the damage. Meet with your insurance company adjuster first, before signing anything with contractors, lawyers or public adjusters. Public adjusters are not connected with the insurance company and charge fees for their services.

It may take some time for a claims adjuster to get to your house. If many homes are damaged, they may have several sites to visit. Also, police may stop people from entering an area until its safe. Please be patient.

In a large disaster, adjusters may be called in from across the country. Many of them may not be familiar with your area and will need very detailed directions to locate your property. If you are not able to stay in your house due to the damage, be sure to tell your company where you can be reached. If possible, give them a cell phone number where you can be reached at all times.

If a reasonable amount of time passes (about three days for a major disaster) and you haven't heard from your adjuster, contact the Utah Insurance Department. Talk to the Department's disaster team members on site or call 801-538-3035 (in Salt Lake area) or 800-439-3805 (long distance in state).

### **While you wait for the adjuster**

- Make sure your address is visible from the street. One idea: paint your insurance company name, your policy number and your temporary address on a sheet of plywood.
- Take action to prevent further damage to your property – cover holes in the roof and windows and remove as much water as possible from the house. Don't make permanent repairs until the adjuster has inspected the property.
- Move important papers and items not covered by insurance to a safer location.
- Make a list of everything you would like to show the adjuster when he or she arrives.
- Seek shelter elsewhere if necessary, but leave information on where you can be contacted.

### **Making a record**

- Create a detailed list of damaged items.
- Take photos of the damage. This is very important if you must throw away or move items before the adjuster has seen them. Save a remnant of items that must be thrown away.
- Keep all your receipts (for tarps, wet/dry-vac, etc.) and document the time you spend securing your property.
- Keep a record of conversations with insurance personnel and other officials including the person's name, the time and date and a summary of what you talked about.



## When the adjuster arrives

- Ask for identification.
- Get the adjuster's name, his/her local phone number and company.
- Ask questions if there's anything you don't understand and take detailed notes.

## Settling Your Claim

### Some things to keep in mind

- You are entitled to be reimbursed fairly* for your loss, but you are not supposed to make a profit.
- You can't collect more than the face value* of your policy.
- You can't collect for uninsured items*, such as landscaping.
- Additional living expenses* are usually covered if you need to move to a hotel because of damage to your home as a result of a covered event. However, most policies will not pay for a hotel room if you leave your home because of power outage that occurs off premises. Lodging and living expenses should be reasonable and you should keep receipts.
- Food spoilage* typically is not covered by insurance if it results from a power outage.
- Most policies cover tree removal* if it falls on a covered structure. (Usually, there is a maximum of \$500 for removal if a covered structure is damaged.) The value of the tree is usually not covered and your policy won't pay to remove it if it doesn't damage anything when it falls.
- Depending on the type of loss, your insurance may pay for removal of debris from your property in association with that loss. Coverage for debris removal may be limited to a specific dollar amount. Read your policy or check with the agent or company for details.
- Inspect your roof* or have it inspected if you are not sure about roof damage.
- The first check you get* from your insurance company is often an advance, not a final payment.
- If you're offered an on-the-spot settlement*, you can accept the check right away but make sure that if you find another damage you can "reopen" the claim and file for an additional amount. Most policies require claims to be filed within one year from the date of the disaster.
- Don't agree to a final settlement* until you are satisfied that it is fair. You are entitled to obtain independent estimates if you wish.
- Don't sign anything* that limits the company's future obligation. For example, it might take months to discover earthquake damage to your foundation.

Don't let a con artist talk you into filing a phony claim. Insurance fraud – lying to an insurance company to get money – is illegal.

### About your car

Broken glass or body damage is covered only if you have comprehensive insurance coverage. It will pay for repair of body damage after payment of your deductible. You are not covered if you only have liability insurance.

## Avoiding The "Fly-By-Nighters"

Contractors may be in short supply if there's a major disaster. Don't let desperation put you in a position to be ripped off. Here are a few tips to help you avoid common scams.

- Avoid repair scams* by dealing with reputable licensed and insured local contractors you know or can check out. Ask people you trust for recommendations.
- Do not deal with "fly-by-night"* roofers or remodelers who go door-to-door, especially those not known in your community or those who offer greatly reduced prices because they say they just completed work nearby and claim to have materials left over.
- Don't be afraid to ask for identification* - especially if money is changing hands, and proof of general liability and workers' compensation insurance.
- Don't spend a lot of money on temporary repairs*. Remember that payments for temporary repairs are part of the total settlement. If you pay a contractor a large sum for a temporary repair job, you may not have enough money for permanent repairs.
- Insist on a written contract* that includes a description of the work, total cost and completion date.

## What To Do After The Storm

### Call your agent:

- Agent's name and phone number .....
- Ask for policy number and renewal date .....
- Ask about a housing allowance .....
- Ask about storage to secure items .....
- Ask about car rental .....

### Report your claim:

- Phone number to report claim .....
- Date claim reported .....
- Insurance claim number .....
- Insurance company .....

### When you call, have on hand your:

- Insurance agent's name and address .....
- Insurance policy number and renewal date .....

### Be prepared to give:

- Complete directions to your home.
- Your temporary address and how to find you.
- A cell phone number if you have one.

### Write down:

- The claims reference number .....
- The name of the person you talk to at the insurance company .....
- When you called and other pertinent information .....

### Ask about:

- Details on filing a claim, including any deadlines .....
- Arrangements for an adjuster to inspect the damage .....
- Temporary housing and living expenses if you can't live in your home .....
- Car rental if your vehicle can't be driven .....

### When the adjuster arrives:

- Adjuster's name .....
- Adjuster's business address and phone number .....

### Begin gathering information to support your claim:

- Photos
- Receipts
- Detailed list of items

**Prevent further damage by covering roof, windows and removing water (only if you can do so safely). Don't agree to final settlement until you're satisfied. You are entitled to independent estimates.**

**If you haven't heard from your agent, adjuster or insurance company within 3 days, call us at the Utah Insurance Department, Property and Casualty Division: at 801-538-3035 (in Salt Lake area) or 800-439-3805 (In-state long distance).**