

# **POLICYHOLDER PREPAREDNESS & MAKING A CLAIM**

By purchasing flood insurance, you have taken the first and most important step toward protecting yourself against financial loss. You can add an extra level of protection by being prepared to speed up the claims process – before a flood ever occurs.

## **I. What To Do Before A Flood**

Don't wait until waters are rising in your area and flood threatens. Take steps now that will make your life much easier when a flood occurs.

### **Create a personalized “flood file”**

- Include a copy of your insurance policy and the name and contact information for your agent or insurance company.
- Perform a thorough, room-by-room inventory of all possessions in your home or businesses. Describe each item and include serial numbers, model numbers, date of purchase and receipts. Itemize everything – from sofas, chairs and rugs, to pictures, plants and contents of drawers and cupboards.
- Take photos or video of your possessions and add this to your “flood file.”
- Safely store your flood file (flood insurance policy, itemized list, receipts, video, etc.) in a secure place, away from the property you are insuring; typically a safety deposit box.

### **It is important to know what your policy covers.**

Flood insurance covers buildings and/or contents for residential and non-residential properties. To claim personal property loss you must have contents coverage.

#### **Covered:**

- The insured building
- Built-in appliances and central air
- Permanently installed paneling, wallpaper, cabinets and carpets
- Garage (up to 10 percent of total building coverage)
- Limited coverage for basements
- Debris removal
- Content, if contents coverage has been purchased

#### **Not covered:**

- Vehicles
- Decks
- Land and fences
- Plants
- Animal
- Currency
- Boats
- Swimming pools

## **CHECK YOUR POLICY**

Make sure all the information is correct, including information about your mortgage company. If you have refinanced with a company other than the one shown on your policy, call your insurance agent or company representative immediately.

## **REVIEW THE CLAIMS FILING PROCESS**

Call your insurance agent or company representative and discuss the particular requirements for reporting a flood claim. These can vary from company to company, so knowing how to proceed can save a lot of effort later. Remember, after a flood it may be difficult to get in touch with your agent or insurance company. Power and phone service may be interrupted, or phone lines may be overwhelmed with other callers. It will benefit you to know just what to do in advance of flooding.

## **PLAN AN EMERGENCY CONTACT**

After a flood, you may be unable to stay in your home or to be contacted at your home address and phone number. Share an emergency contact— address and phone number— with your insurance agent and family so you can be reached.

# **II. What To Do After A Flood**

A flood is an overwhelming experience. But taking quick action will put you back in control of your home and your life.

## **STEPS TO TAKE IMMEDIATELY**

### **STEP 1**

**Contact Your Agent or Company Representative to Report Your Loss:** Have ready—the name of your insurance company, policy number and a phone number and/or e-mail address where you can be reached. All flood insurance policies require you to give prompt written notice of loss. If you get in touch with your agent or company representative directly, they will advise you how to file your notice of claim. Otherwise, you must send a written notice to your insurance company with your policy number.

### **STEP 2**

**Separate Your Property:** Your policy also requires you to separate damaged property from undamaged property. But don't throw anything away before an adjuster has seen it, unless local law requires you to. In that case, take photos of the property before disposing of it and keep samples for the adjuster to see. (For example, cut out a piece of wall-to-wall carpet.) Do all you can to protect undamaged property.

### **STEP 3**

Make a List of Damaged Contents: If you've purchased contents coverage, make a list of damaged property. If you prepared comprehensive lists before the flood, this should be relatively easy. List the quantity of each item, a description, brand name, where purchased, its cost, model and serial number (if appropriate) and your estimate of the loss amount. Attach your bills, receipts, photos and any other documents.

### **STEP 4**

Make a List of Damaged Contents: If you've purchased contents coverage, make a list of damaged property. If you prepared comprehensive lists before the flood, this should be relatively easy. List the quantity of each item, a description, brand name, where purchased, its cost, model and serial number (if appropriate) and your estimate of the loss amount. Attach your bills, receipts, photos and any other documents.

### **HANDLING YOUR CLAIM: WORKING WITH YOUR ADJUSTER**

Generally, your adjuster will contact you within 24-48 hours after receiving your notice of loss. However, depending on local conditions and the severity of flooding, it may take more time.

Once the adjuster reaches you, a time will be set for the adjuster to view your property. You may ask the adjuster for an advance or partial payment. If you have a mortgage, your mortgage company will need to sign the Building Property advance check.

### **“SCOPING” YOUR LOSS**

During the initial visit to your property, the adjuster will take measurements and photographs and note direct flood damage. This is called “scoping” a loss. Be assured that your adjuster will be an experienced claims professional and will notice many points of damage you could overlook. However, you are encouraged to point out all damage you have noticed.

After the “scope” is finished, the adjuster will give you a local contact telephone number and will tell you whether any additional visits are needed. (This may be the case if damage is extensive.)

### **PREPARING A DETAILED ESTIMATE**

The adjuster then uses the knowledge gained from the visit(s)—and the documentation you have provided—to complete a detailed estimate of damages. You will get a copy. Use it as a guide when you ask for bids for repair work from licensed professional contractors.

## **FILING YOUR CLAIM: PROOF OF LOSS REQUIREMENT**

Your official claim for damages is called a Proof of Loss. This must be fully completed, signed and in the hands of your insurance company within 60 days after the loss occurs. The Proof of Loss includes a detailed estimate to replace or repair the damaged property. In most cases, the adjuster, as a courtesy, will provide you with a suggested Proof of Loss. However, you are responsible for making sure that it is complete, accurate and filed in a timely manner. Be sure to keep a copy of the Proof of Loss—and copies of all supporting documents—for your records.

## **EXTENSIONS BEYOND 60 DAYS**

In some severe floods, FEMA may authorize Proof of Loss extensions for everyone in your area. Your insurance company will be notified, as will local news outlets.

## **PAYMENT OF CLAIMS**

Your claim is payable after:

- You and the insurer agree on the amount of damages.
- The insurer receives your complete, accurate and signed Proof of Loss.

More information on claims payment is in your policy.

## **PAYMENT FOR BUILDINGS AND PERSONAL PROPERTY**

Any check for building property must include your mortgage company name, or the name of the individual holding your mortgage. A check for Personal Property will usually be in your name only.

## **FILING YOUR SUPPLEMENTAL CLAIM**

If you notice additional damage to your Building Property or Personal Property after filing your claim, you may file a Supplemental Claim. This means, essentially, that you must repeat the documentation and filing process for your original claim, including a Proof of Loss—but only for the newly discovered damage.

Supplemental Claims should start with immediately notifying your adjuster, agent and/or company representative. Once you have completed documentation, present it to your adjuster who may need to make another property visit to verify your loss.

Once you receive final payment for your building and/or personal property, the claims process is complete.

**NOTE**

A Supplemental Claim must be filed within 60 days after the loss. If you discover additional damage after the 60-day limit has passed, contact your adjuster immediately. Claims filed after 60 days are decided on a case-by-case basis.

**Please remember:**

Any claim settlement you make in the event of a flood will be determined by the amount of coverage you have and the deductibles you have chosen. If you are concerned that your coverage is not high enough, or that your deductibles are too high, your agent or company representative can counsel you about increasing coverage and/or decreasing deductibles.

### **III. Addressing Questions About Your Insurance Claim**

The NFIP provides you with a process to appeal decisions regarding your flood insurance claim. This process will help you resolve claim issues, but it cannot give you added coverage or claim limits beyond those in your NFIP policy. In filing and completing your insurance claim, you may have questions, or need further explanations of decisions that have been made, especially with regard to coverage, dollar amount of damages, or your Proof of Loss.

#### **FOUR STEPS TO APPEALING YOUR CLAIM**

**STEP 1**

Talk with your adjuster, who has more knowledge about your claim than anyone. If you don't understand certain decisions regarding, for example, application of coverage, timing of the filing of Proof of Loss, or the damage estimate, contact your adjuster first.

**STEP 2**

If you are not satisfied with the adjuster's answers, or do not agree with decisions, get contact information for the adjuster's supervisor.

**STEP 3**

If the adjuster's supervisor can't resolve your issues, contact the insurance company's claim representative. Ask your insurance agent or your insurance company representative for assistance. Please refer to your flood policy for more information on appeals.

## **STEP 4**

If you still have questions or concerns after following steps one through three, contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

**Federal Emergency Management  
Agency-Mitigation Division-Room 433  
Risk Insurance Branch  
ATTN: Director of Claims  
500 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20472**

A letter should be written by the Named Insured (as it appears on your NFIP policy) or by a legal representative, if necessary. The representative should clearly identify his/her relationship to the Named Insured. (For example, a son or daughter could be handling a claim for an elderly parent.) A legal representative may be asked to provide authorization from the Named Insured or other legal documents verifying the relationship.

## **WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR LETTER**

1. The Policy Number, as shown on your NFIP policy's Declarations Page
2. The policyholder's name, as shown as the Named Insured on the Declarations Page
3. The property address, as shown on the Declarations Page. (Not your mailing address, if it is different from the property address)
4. How you can be contacted, if you are out of your home
5. The details of your concern. (Please be as complete as possible)
6. The dates of contact and contact details for the persons with whom you have spoken in steps one through three
7. Enclose documentation of everything that supports your appeal:
  - A detailed list of damaged property and the value of individual items
  - Supporting photographs and/or
  - A contractor's detailed estimate to repair damages, with supporting photographs (Comparing contractor and adjuster estimates in detail will help resolve differences)

## **TAKE NOTES**

At each step, you should keep clear records of your attempts to resolve issues. Write down the names and titles of people you speak with; dates of contact; contact information; and details of the discussion. If you have to go further in appealing your claim, these records can be vitally important.

## **Disclaimer and Source**

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided here is accurate. However, your Standard Flood Insurance Policy (SFIP), your application, any endorsements, and the Declarations Page comprise the official Policy or contract of insurance. Any differences between the information and wording in this handbook will be resolved in favor of your flood insurance policy. If you have questions, please refer to your policy, or call your insurance agent or company representative.

*Please do not send originals of documents such as contractor's estimates. Send photocopies and keep originals in a safe place. Your claim will be reviewed and you will be informed of FEMA's finding directly, with a copy going to your insurance company. If you do not agree with the final decision, please refer to your flood insurance policy.*

Source: <http://www.fema.gov>