

Insurance Claims For Storm Damage Worth Exploring

Document all claims, and review policies.

This weekend's storm – Hurricane Irene – may not have been the epic weather event some experts predicted, but the combination of high winds and heavy rain did cause property damage from downed tree limbs and water.

If your home or automobile sustained damage as a result of the storm, you may have a right to make a claim either against your homeowner's or automobile insurance policy. If you have flood insurance, that may be applicable as well. If the damage was caused by a tree on someone else's property, you may have a right to bring a claim against the neighbor.

There are some basic things you should do when pursuing an insurance claim.

First, make sure that you document carefully all items that are going to be the subject of a claim. Take photographs depicting the damage. Then, if applicable, take any steps you can to mitigate the damage or prevent it from getting worse.

Second, read the insurance policies. Try to determine, if it is not too confusing, which policy provisions you plan to rely on when making your claim. A well-informed claimant is much more likely to be successful in pursuing a claim.

Third, notify the insurance agent or company promptly, and make sure that you fully disclose the nature and extent of your claim. Offer to provide all the information you have collected. Tell the insurance company if you have taken action to mitigate the damage. (Failing to timely inform the insurance company of a claim can jeopardize your right to pursue the claim.)

Fourth, make sure that you document all your conversations with the insurance agent or company throughout the entire process. Politely ask for a name of the person to whom you are speaking, and make note of the time and subject matters discussed. Keep copies of all documents that you give the insurance company.

At some point, the insurance company is likely to send out an insurance adjuster or investigator to make a determination as to the value of your claim. The adjuster's valuation must reflect the true value of the loss. If you disagree with the adjuster, you are entitled to bring that disagreement to the insurance company's attention and argue about it.

One common area of dispute between homeowners and insurance companies involves water damage.

Ordinarily, homeowner's policies only insure property damaged by water from outside the home, such as water coming through windows or the roof. On the other hand, a flood insurance policy ordinarily covers property damages caused by water seeping through the basement floor or from a creek or river that overflows. Understanding first and foremost what coverage you actually own, and determining exactly how your damages fit within the confines of that coverage, is critical when pursuing your claim.

Before you accept any payment, or sign any documents put in front of you, make sure you read everything carefully. Acknowledging, for example, that the claim is satisfied in full might make it impossible for you to make another claim related to the same event.

Finally, seek legal counsel if you are not sure how to deal with the situation. Some claims are so minor that it may not seem worth it – but most attorneys will give you a few minutes on the telephone for free to go over your situation. If your claim involves significant damage, it might be worth your while to have someone help you through the process.