

TOOL KIT

Florida residents know firsthand that it pays to plan ahead. Dealing with wildfires, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, winter storms, sinkholes and other disasters, not to mention individual home fires, lightning, smoke and theft, can drastically change our lives.

While we all need to carefully prepare for hurricane season, it pays to make sure your homeowners' insurance contains adequate coverage year-round. This toolkit provides helpful suggestions to prepare you for any type of claim that involves the largest investment you've made — your home. This toolkit is yours — it can be as simple or as comprehensive as you want. Remember, the more detailed documentation you supply during the claims process, the fewer problems you'll have with the claim itself.

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Section 1 Coverage

What does your policy cover and exclude?

Standard homeowners' policies usually limit coverage on valuables such as jewelry, silverware, guns, antiques, boats and other items. Check your policy and contact your insurance agent or company with questions or to request additional coverage.

This is why your inventory is so important – it helps you realize the value of your belongings.

Replacement cost versus actual cash value

When buying coverage, you may insure your property and belongings for actual cash value or replacement cost.

Replacement Cost

Replacement cost is the amount needed to replace or repair your damaged property with materials of similar kind and quality, without deducting for depreciation (the decrease in the value of your home or personal property due to normal wear and tear).

Actual Cash Value

Actual cash value is the amount needed to repair or replace damage to your home after depreciation. For example, your insurance company would deduct for the age and condition of a 17-year-old roof with a 20-year life expectancy.

Here is how the two types of coverage work in practice.

Let's say you bought a new television in 1994 for \$700. In 2005, a lightning strike destroys the TV. A policy for actual cash value will only pay an amount that reflects the TV's current value - say \$300.

A replacement cost policy would cover the entire cost of a new TV of the same type - say \$900. Legislation passed in 2005 requires full payment without a depreciation hold-back for personal residential policies. Call the Consumer Helpline at 1-877-MY-FL-CFO (1-877-693-5236) for further information.

Your agent must offer you replacement cost coverage for your dwelling. If you reject this coverage, you must sign a statement on the application form indicating that you don't want it. Standard replacement cost depends upon the dwelling limit stated on your policy. Insurance companies design most homeowners policies to require the policyholder to insure the dwelling for at least 80 percent of its replacement cost.

While it is rare, you can insure your home for less than 80 percent. If you do so, you will be charged a co-payment penalty, in addition to your deductible, when you file a claim. Some companies offer guaranteed replacement cost dwelling insurance — an option that costs only a few dollars more, and insures your home for an increased amount, even if it exceeds policy limits. Many companies will not offer guaranteed replacement benefits for older homes.

Windstorm coverage

Most homeowners' insurance policies cover damage caused by windstorms, hurricanes and hail, unless your dwelling is in the high-risk area known as the Wind-Pool Zone. If your dwelling is in this area, it is likely that windstorm coverage will be excluded and you will need a separate policy for this coverage. If you have a mortgage, your mortgage company can require that you secure this specialized coverage or they will apply force-placed coverage, which can be more costly.

Additional Living Expense

Homeowners' packages provide additional living expense (ALE) coverage that will pay some extra expenses if damage to your home prevents you from living there while it is being repaired. Most policies also will provide this coverage when a civil authority (law enforcement agency, emergency management service, etc.) prohibits the use of a residence due to direct damage to neighboring homes by a covered threat.

The items typically covered - above and beyond normal expenses - include extra costs for food, housing, telephone, transportation (to and from work or school), relocation and storage, utility installation and furniture rental for a temporary residence. Be sure to check your policy to find out what is specifically covered.

This coverage applies only to differences in expenses. For example, it would apply to the cost of restaurant meals minus normal food expenses. It does not cover your mortgage, groceries and utilities or the monthly cost of a telephone in a rented space (since you normally pay for the telephone in your house).

Your policy may designate a limit of coverage for additional living expenses, but your policy does not obligate your company to pay this amount up front or in full if you suffer a total or partial loss. For this reason, you must keep receipts for additional living expenses and submit these to your company for reimbursement.

Additional living expense coverage does not apply to your dependent children while they are away at college. It applies only to the primary insured structure in the event of a loss.

Policies generally offer ALE coverage without any deductible.

Biological Deterioration (mold and fungi)

Typically, mold that results from a covered peril is a covered claim through your personal residential property insurance (homeowners') policy. An example would be a sudden and accidental discharge of water — like a burst pipe or other plumbing failure, or claims that arise from water damage due to hurricanes or flooding. Please refer to your policy provisions for details of specific mold coverage and limitations.

Most insurers now offer limited levels of mold-related property damage coverage within the basic policy. Many insurers offer \$10,000 of limited coverage, with an opportunity to purchase additional coverage for an additional premium. Other insurers exclude mold-related property damage entirely, but offer coverage in amounts of \$10,000, \$15,000, \$25,000, \$50,000 and policy limits, for an additional premium.

Ordinance or Law Exclusion

If a local building ordinance or law increases the cost of repairing or replacing your dwelling, the insurance company will not pay that extra amount, unless you have added ordinance or law coverage to your policy.

This is how it works: Your home was built in 1982 and the building code called for construction at least five feet off the ground. In 2001, the building code was changed to call for the same construction at least 10 feet above ground.

Complying with this code will require a change in design and building materials; thus, you will pay more to repair or rebuild your home, if necessary. If you have a claim that is covered by your homeowners policy, and have ordinance or law excluded, the insurance company will not pay the cost of bringing the repaired home up to current building requirements.

Your agent must offer you ordinance or law coverage. If you do not wish to buy this coverage, you must sign a form stating that you reject it. Some companies automatically include the coverage in their policies.

Flood Insurance

Typically, homeowners' policies exclude flood damage (rising water). Depending on your home's location, however, you may qualify for flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program. You also may qualify for a discount if you include a special elevation report with your application. For more information, contact the National Flood Insurance Program at 1-888-FLOOD29 (1-888-356-6329).

The coverage involves a 30-day waiting period before the policy becomes effective; unless the policy is purchased at the same time you buy your home. Some insurance companies also offer flood insurance. Generally, you will get separate coverage for your home and personal property. Your insurance agent or company can assist you with application forms for flood coverage.

Sinkholes and Catastrophic Ground Collapse

Florida insurance companies are not required to include sinkhole coverage on new or existing homeowners' insurance policies. However, they are required to inform homeowners that sinkhole coverage is available as an extra coverage — usually in the form of a rider, or addendum.

A law passed in 2007 requires that insurance companies now include "catastrophic ground cover collapse" that results in an order to evacuate, and the insured structure being condemned by the governmental agency authorized by law to issue such an order for that structure.

Surplus lines insurers are not required to offer sinkhole coverage, but many do. Ask your agent for details.

Section 2 Property Inventory

The Department of Financial Services recommends conducting a room-by-room inventory so that if you have a claim caused by any of the covered perils in your insurance policy, you will be able to file an accurate claim and get better claims results.

The following pages include the main rooms of the house, but don't forget other areas such as closets, basement, attic, garage, porch, patio, workroom or shed. When checking these areas, be sure to check all items. It's also a good idea to photograph your personal property. Pictures add details to your inventory that written documents can't. Also be sure to include the year of purchase, price and brand name.

Once you've completed your home inventory, compare the estimated value of your items to the amount of insurance coverage your current policy has. Also, you may want to check with your insurance agent or company to determine if you have any items that are underinsured, or if you need any additional coverage.

It's very important to update your inventory at least once a year. Remember, your claim settlement depends on you supplying accurate, documented information.

TIP: When dealing with a homeowners' insurance claim, never give original inventories or documents to anyone. If the original document is damaged, there is no way to reproduce a replacement.

Personal Asset Inventory

For each of the following categories, write down all the items that apply. Use separate sheets of paper for each if necessary.

- Living Room
- Dining Room
- Kitchen
- Family Room (Den)
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Other

TIP: If possible, take photographs or video of your property and store all records in a safe, dry place.

Disclaimer: This manual may not be complete, do not omit any item from your inventory.

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Living Room			
Furniture			
Sofas/Chairs			
Mirrors			
Lamps			
Rugs/Carpet			
Tables			
Curtains/Draperies			
Entertainment Center			
Bookcases/Books			
Other			
Arts and Crafts			
Pictures/Paintings			
Statues/Pottery			
Other			
Electronics			
Television			
Stereo			
VCR/DVD			
CDs			
Telephones			
Computer			
Clocks			
Other			
Misc.			
Air Conditioner			
Cabinets			
Fireplace fixtures			
Blinds			
Other			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Dining Room			
Furniture			
Tables			
Chairs			
Cabinets			
Curtains/Draperies			
Chandeliers/Lamps			
Mirrors			
Rugs/Carpet			
Other			
Electronics			
Telephones			
Clocks			
Other			
Arts and Crafts			
Pictures/Paintings			
Statues/Pottery			
Other			
Misc.			
China/Crystal			
Glassware			
Table Linens			
Blinds			
Other			
Notes:			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Kitchen			
Furniture			
Floor Mats			
Cabinets			
Curtains/Draperies			
Tables			
Chairs			
Other			
Major Appliances			
Freezer			
Refrigerator			
Oven			
Microwave			
Other			
Utensils			
Pots/Pans			
Silverware			
Glasses			
Plates/Dishes			
Cooking Utensils			
Other			
Misc.			
Blender			
Toaster			
Can Opener			
Coffee Maker			
Pictures/Paintings			
Blinds			
Cabinets			
Other			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Family Room (Den)			
Furniture			
Tables			
Sofas/Chairs			
Rugs/Carpet			
Entertainment Center			
Game table			
Bookcases/Books			
Desks			
Mirrors			
Other			
Electronics			
Television			
VCR/DVD			
Stereo			
CDs			
Computer			
Video Game System			
Clocks			
Other			
Arts and Crafts			
Pictures/Paintings			
Statues/Pottery			
Other			
Misc.			
Air Conditioner			
Fireplace fixtures			
Blinds/Draperies			
Other			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Bedrooms			
Furniture			
Beds			
Nightstand			
Lamps			
Desks			
Rugs/Carpet			
Bed Linens			
Curtains/Draperies			
Dressers			
Bureaus/Chests			
Bookcases/Books			
Mirrors			
Other			
Arts and Crafts			
Pictures/Paintings			
Statues/Pottery			
Other			
Electronics			
Computer			
Clocks			
Television			
VCR/DVD			
Stereo			
CDs			
Other			
Misc.			
Blinds			
Clothing			
Other			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Bathrooms			
Furniture			
Hamper			
Floor Mats			
Mirrors			
Bath Mats			
Bathtub			
Curtains/Draperies			
Other			
Arts and Crafts			
Pictures/Paintings			
Statues/Pottery			
Other			
Electronics			
Electric Toothbrush			
Hair Dryer			
Shaver			
Curlers			
Other			
Misc.			
Towels/Linens			
Toiletries			
Scale			
Other			
Notes:			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Other			
Real Estate			
Vehicles			
Cars/Trucks			
Boats			
RVs			
Other			
Jewelry and Collectibles			
Computer Hardware/Peripheral Devices			
Notes:			

Item	Price	Date	Brand Name
Other			
Miscellaneous			
Cameras			
Furs			
Antiques			
Tools			
Firearms			
Plants			
Toys/Porcelain Dolls			
Telescope			
Fish/Fish Tanks			
Musical Instruments			
Outdoor Furniture			
Lawnmower			
Other			

Notes:

The Claims Process

Once you have determined that the claim exceeds your policy deductible, immediately report property damage to your agent and insurance company. The company will arrange for an insurance adjuster to visit your property and begin the claim.

Make emergency repairs and document them - keeping a file with all of your receipts, as well as any photos or video of the damage, to submit with your claim.

Don't make extensive repairs before the claims adjuster arrives or throw out damaged furniture and other expensive items; the adjuster will want to see them.

Make sure your adjuster is properly licensed to conduct business in Florida, and be sure to write down contact information including phone numbers and addresses for the adjuster and firm he or she may work for. If you have any questions about the license status of an adjuster, or the way your claim was handled, call the DFS Consumer Helpline toll-free at 1-877-My-FL-CFO (1-877-693-5236). Keep a record of the date, time, and name of all people you speak to regarding the claim. Also keep a copy of anything you sign, as well as any photos, receipts, and other documentary evidence.

Note about mediation:

In this free, informal process, a trained, neutral mediator tries to help resolve the dispute without dictating the outcome. However, it is important to remember that mediation is nonbinding. To find out if you qualify, call the DFS Consumer Helpline toll-free at 1-877-My-FL-CFO (1-877-693-5236).

If you and your company representative cannot reach a satisfactory settlement together, you may hire an appraiser to reach a compromise figure. You and the company split the cost. If you both still disagree, you may hire a second appraiser, called an umpire. The decision of any two of these people is binding.

Adjuster Information and Contact Log

When you submit a claim for damage from a hurricane, your insurance company will schedule an evaluation conducted by an adjuster. Adjusters must be licensed in the state of Florida. There are three types of adjusters who are authorized to estimate damages following a disaster:

Company Adjusters work for your insurance company and are paid by them to estimate your damage and submit a report that will be used as the basis of the claim settlement. You do not pay this adjuster. These adjusters must be licensed in Florida. Emergency adjusters are temporarily licensed adjusters hired by insurance companies to assist with a large volume of claims, usually as a result of a disaster.

Independent adjusters usually work as employees of an independent adjusting firm that has been hired by an insurance company to handle the company's claims. Independent adjusters obtain and submit the claim information to the insurance company. The insurance company makes the final decision regarding benefits paid.

Public adjusters are self-employed and do not work for insurance companies or independent adjusting firms. They may work in a public adjusting firm. Public adjusters are hired to settle claims with the insurance company on your behalf. Generally their payment fee is a contracted percentage of the total claim settlement amount. Public adjuster's fees aren't set by the state, although an emergency order may be issued limiting the percentage of the fee that may be charged for adjusting hurricane claims. You negotiate and agree on the fee you pay for their services. The Department of Financial Services has no regulatory authority over contractual provisions between the public adjuster and the insured.

In the event you need to file a claim, you will deal with an insurance adjuster. Keep this person's name and contact information handy at all times to facilitate evaluation of the loss and to handle any dispute. Also, use this space to record information from your contacts with the adjuster and the insurance company – include dates, the information discussed, and the names and phone numbers of the people you talk to. This log will help in the event of a claim dispute.

Adjuster name:
Adjuster's Company:
Adjuster's Phone:
Adjuster's License Number:
Claim Number:

Log:

Before the Storm

- Be sure to have key financial and insurance information available – this kit can help.
- Conduct an annual insurance checkup to make sure you are adequately covered.
- Review the policy information and other items in this tool kit to make sure they are up to date.
- Establish two evacuation locations where your family will meet if you are not directed to a location by local authorities.
- Turn your TV and radio on to receive emergency instructions from local authorities. Have a battery-operated radio available and identify a designated emergency alert radio station and TV channel.
- Use your TV or radio to receive information concerning the weather. The power may be out, so it is imperative to keep a portable AM/FM radio on hand with a fresh battery.
- Contact your employer and let them know you have been told to evacuate.
- Always travel with an emergency supply kit. If possible, keep a kit permanently in your vehicle.
- Always keep your vehicle at least half fueled in the event you need to immediately leave – you may not find an operating gas station for a long time.
- Bring your pets, but realize that only “service animals” may be permitted in public shelters. Therefore, inquire in advance how and where you can leave your pets; store a small emergency pet food ration as a precaution and leave a 3-day supply of food and water with your pets if you are forced to leave them behind.
- Time permitting, move any furniture or outdoor valuables into your home and lock all the windows and doors. Leave a note on the door stating your destination and contact information. And check to see if any neighbors may need a ride.
- Be sure to have cash on hand. ATMs will not work if the power is out, and banks may not be able to restock the ATMs for a while once power is restored. You may want to include some cash in your tool kit.
- You might also want to consider keeping an AC adapter that can be plugged into a car lighter to power your radio, cell phone or similar small electronics.

When a Storm Approaches

Hurricane preparedness tips

Have a plan of evacuation, including a list of people to contact in the event you need to leave your home.

Home

List individuals to be contacted before and after evacuation (one person should be out of state).

Name:

Email:

Phone Numbers:

Name:

Email:

Phone Numbers:

List evacuation route options.

Route One:

Route Two:

Storm Shelters

First Choice:

Second Choice:

Medical Information

- Physician’s Name and Phone Number
- Pharmacy Name and Phone Number

(Note: If you take prescription medications regularly, you should contact your pharmacy before a storm strikes to get prescriptions filled so that you don’t run out.)

- List of Necessary Medications
- Health Insurance ID card (s)
- Record of Immunizations/Allergies
- Disabilities Documentation
- Living Will
- Dental Records / Child Identity Cards / DNA Swabs

Section **3** Legal and Financial Document Checklist

Collect the following documents and place a check by each one you have. If you are unsure where to obtain them, see the list of sources at the end of this list. These documents will assist if you need to file for government disaster assistance, tax assistance, etc.

Insurance Policies

Call the claims numbers on your insurance policies to verify that the policy numbers are correct. Review your coverage to be sure that they it is adequate for your current circumstances.

- Property Insurance
- Rental Insurance
- Auto Insurance
- Health Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Other

Financial Information

- Bank/Credit Union Statements
- Credit/Debit Card Statements
- Retirement Accounts (401K, TSP, IRA)
- Investment Accounts (Stocks, Bonds, Mutual Funds)

Tax Information

Tax returns from the previous year may be required to apply for new loans and to verify qualification for income-based assistance.

- Previous Year's Tax Returns
- Property Tax Statement
- Personal Property Tax (i.e. Car Tax)

Sources of Income/Assets

Having proof of your income sources will be important if you are confronted with an event that interrupts your income.

- Recent Pay Stubs for All Sources of Income
- Government Benefits (e.g. Social Security, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Veterans')
- Alimony Income
- Child Support Income
- Professional Appraisals of Personal Property
- Rewards Accounts (e.g., Frequent Flyer Programs, Hotel Rewards)

Special Note About Security Concerns

In addition, electronic payments, credit/debit cards and software programs for taxes and other finances require a password, PIN (Personal Identification Number) or personal security questions as an extra measure of protection. It is important to keep these access codes secure. DO NOT include a list of passwords and PINs in your documents.

Choosing secure passwords is one of the most important things you can do to keep your accounts safe and avoid the headaches and potential suffering caused by security breaches. Be sure to select a password or PIN that is something you will be able to remember, but that is NOT something easily associated with you, such as a birth date, phone number, nickname or other reference someone could easily discover. Never write your password down or store it in an unencrypted file.

And NEVER give out a password or PIN for any account to anyone, no matter who the person is or claims to be. No customer service representative, systems administrator or corporate security officer should ever ask you for your password or PIN. If someone is authorized to access your account, he or she does not need your password to get access.

Vital Account Information

The following information will be of the most importance immediately after a storm and will help expedite the filing of claims. Be sure to know what your insurance policies cover. It is a good idea to perform an annual review of the type and amount of coverage you have, to make sure you are adequately protected in the event of a loss.

Insurance

Property Insurance

- Company Name
- Policy Number
- Company Phone Number
- Company Address
- Deductible
- Premium Due Date

Health Insurance

- Company Name
- Policy Number
- Company Phone Number
- Company Address
- Deductible
- Premium Due Date

Rental Insurance

- Company Name
- Policy Number
- Company Phone Number
- Company Address
- Deductible
- Premium Due Date

Life Insurance

- Company Name
- Policy Number
- Company Phone Number
- Company Address
- Deductible
- Premium Due Date

Auto Insurance

- Company Name
- Policy Number
- Company Phone Number
- Company Address
- Deductible
- Premium Due Date

Other Insurance (Boat, Windstorm, Flood, etc.)

Checklist Hints

These helpful hints provide direction in identifying the best resources for gathering the documents listed on the Checklist of Important Legal Documents and Financial Statements.

How to get important documents

You can obtain copies of birth, death, marriage, divorce and adoption certificates from your state health or social services administrations for a minimal fee.

The IRS says U.S. Citizens who receive income are required to have an SSN. Call your local social security office for assistance in obtaining new/replacement cards, or refer to the SSN FAQ Web page <http://www.cpsr.org/cpsr/privacy/ssn/ssn.faq.html> for further assistance.

A copy of your passport will expedite obtaining a replacement passport if needed. Information about obtaining a passport is available at <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>.

Information on U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is available at <http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/>. Naturalization documents are the only acceptable proof of citizenship for individuals not born in the United States.

A Will is an extremely helpful document that can help reduce family conflicts, probate, time and expenses during the stressful time of losing a loved one. A Short Form Will, an uncomplicated will used to give all assets equally to one or more heirs, can generally be obtained for less than \$10. Most financial planners can help you with this or you can contact your local legal aid offices.

A Power of Attorney is a legal document that authorizes another person to act on your behalf. That person does not have to be an attorney, just someone you trust to make decisions for you if you cannot make them yourself. A power of attorney can grant complete authority or can be limited to certain acts and/or for certain periods of time.

If you need a copy of your mortgage or deed of trust, contact your lending institution. Proof of home ownership may be required in order to receive federal disaster assistance.

If you do not have your car ownership papers, you should be able to get a reissued vehicle title or registration from your local Department of Motor Vehicles.

Financial Obligations

Having a record of your financial obligations can be extremely important to demonstrate your discretionary income and to qualify for income-based assistance following a disaster. If you do not have a lease, having proof of utility payments is very important to demonstrate residence in the home.

- Mortgage Statement
- Lease
- Utility Bills (Electric, Water, Gas)
- Car Payment
- Student Loan
- Alimony Payments
- Child Support Payments
- Elder Care Facilities
- Other Debt

Financial Account Information

Name of institution:

Address:

Phone Number:

Account Number:

Web Site:

Mortgage Information

If your home is mortgaged, any insurance claim settlement will be made out to you and the mortgage holder. You will need to keep the mortgage holder informed of the process and arrange a schedule of release of funds for repairs.

Name of institution:

Address:

Phone Number:

Account Number:

Web Site:

Additional Accounts (Utility companies, cell phone provider, etc.)