



BREAZEALE, SACHSE & WILSON, L.L.P.
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

The Hurricane's Gone, Now What?

After the storm, there are several steps you should take that will aid in the filing of property damage insurance claim.

Immediately call your insurance agent or insurance company:

Report the damage to your insurance agent or insurance company representative. Ask questions such as: Am I covered? Does my claim exceed my deductible? How long will it take to process my claim? Will I need to obtain estimates for repairs to structural damage? What is my claim number? What is the name and contact information of the insurance adjuster assigned to my claim? Do I need to fill out a claim form?

After the initial contact with your insurance company, keep in regular contact with your adjuster to ensure that you have done or are doing everything that is required of you so that your claim process can run as smoothly as possible.

Making temporary repairs:

It is important to mitigate your damages by preserving the value of your property and preventing further damages.

First, document all damage with photos or videos. As soon as possible, make temporary repairs to prevent further weather related damage. Cover holes in the roof, walls, doors and windows with plastic or boards. Document all repairs with photos or videos. Save receipts for all repairs, including receipts for any material you buy, and record your time spent.

Be careful not to risk your own safety in making the repairs. Avoid using electrical appliances that have been exposed to water unless they've been checked by a technician.

Get written estimates from contractors before hiring them to do repairs. Make sure to get written invoices for all work performed and expenses incurred.

Don't make extensive permanent repairs until after an insurance claims adjuster has been to your home and assessed the damage.

Prepare for the adjuster's visit:

The claims process may begin in one of two ways.

1. Your insurance company may send you a claim form, known as a "proof of loss form," to complete. If so, get the completed form back to the company as soon as possible. Complete the claim form with as much detail as possible, documenting all known damage. Include copies of all photos or videos you have taken of the damage. Also, it will be helpful to include any documents such as pictures, receipts, bills, and/or invoices evidencing the condition of the building before the hurricane or any repairs or replacements made before the hurricane to help establish the condition prior to the storm.

Keep in regular contact with the company/your adjuster to ensure receipt of the completed claim form and the status of your claim.

2. An adjuster may visit your home before you're asked to fill out any forms (An adjuster is a person professionally trained to assess the damage). Usually, the more information you have about your damaged home and belongings the faster your claim can be settled.

Major disasters make enormous demands on insurance company personnel. They will try to get to your claim as quickly as possible, but the number of claims being made may put realistic limitations on their ability to service everyone immediately. Try to remain patient, but do keep in regular contact with your insurance company. Your adjuster generally will come prepared to do a thorough and complete study of the damage to your home.

Be sure to keep copies of lists and all documents you submit to your insurance company. Also, keep copies of whatever paperwork your insurance company gives you.

Structure of Your Home:

Identify the structural damage to your home and other buildings on your premises, like a garage, toolshed or in-ground swimming pool. Locate all documents relating to the damaged area, such as invoices for when the roof or garage door was last replaced or repaired, etc.

Make a list of everything you would like to show the adjuster when he or she arrives. This should include cracks in the walls, damage to the floor or ceiling and missing roof tiles. If structural damage is likely even though you can't see any signs of it, discuss this with your adjuster. In some cases, the adjuster may recommend hiring a licensed engineer or architect to inspect the property. You may also need to have the electrical system checked.

Get written bids from reliable, licensed contractors on the repair work. The bids should include details of the materials to be used and prices on a line-by-line basis.

Personal Belongings:

Make lists of the damaged items. Include the brand names and model numbers of appliances and electronic equipment. If possible, take photographs of the damage.

Use your home inventory or put together a set of records - old receipts, bills and photographs - to help establish the price and age of everything that needs to be replaced or repaired. If your property was destroyed or you no longer have any records, you will have to work from memory. Try to remember where and when you bought each piece and about how much you paid. If you purchased items using your credit card, often you can recover a copy of old credit card bills evidence the purchases and their cost.

Don't throw out damaged furniture and other expensive items because the adjuster will want to see them.

Also, you should check your policy to see if you have food spoilage coverage. Some policies have this coverage with a \$500 limit with no deductible. If you lost electricity as a result of the hurricane and were unable to save food items, you may have an additional claim for such.

Save receipts for additional living expenses.

If your home is severely damaged and are forced to temporarily relocate, save receipts for all your additional living expenses. Some homeowners policies cover additional living expenses such as food and housing costs, telephone or utility installation costs in a temporary residence,

extra transportation costs to and from work or school, relocation and storage expenses and furniture rental for a temporary residence.

For Losses Not Covered by Insurance

There may be disaster assistance available directly from FEMA or U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for losses not covered by insurance. Disaster assistance is money or direct assistance to individuals, families and businesses in an area whose property has been damaged or destroyed and whose losses are not covered by insurance. It is meant to help you with critical expenses that cannot be covered in other ways. This assistance is not intended to restore your damaged property to its condition before the disaster.

Residents with property damage should register quickly with FEMA and be ready to welcome the inspectors who will help speed the claim process. Applicants can help speed the inspection by having documents — mortgage payment, utility receipt, lease, etc. — ready to show proof of ownership or occupancy to the inspector. Having insurance papers available if possible is also helpful. Before an inspector is assigned to an applicant, homeowners and renters with uninsured or underinsured disaster-related damage must register with FEMA. They can register by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) (TTY 1-800-462-7585) online at www.fema.gov.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) can make federally subsidized loans to repair or replace homes, personal property or businesses that sustained damages not covered by insurance. SBA provides low interest disaster loans to homeowners, renters, businesses of all sizes and private, non-profit organizations to repair or replace real estate, personal property, machinery & equipment, inventory and business assets that have been damaged or destroyed in a declared disaster.

To obtain Disaster Loan Program information you may call the SBA at 1-800-659-2955 from 8AM to 9PM (EDT), Mon – Fri and 9 AM to 9 PM (EDT) Saturday and Sunday, or email at disastercustomerservice@sba.gov .

Also, The IRS has announced certain tax relief items to people living in the declared disaster area. Some specific items that may be of benefit to include: (1) Extension of time to pay estimated tax payments or file tax returns that may have been extended from last year, and (2) Casualty losses - Subject to certain limitations explained in the announcement, anyone who suffers a personal property loss not covered by insurance (i.e. big hurricane deductibles) can deduct these losses on their personal tax return. You can even amend last year's return and deduct the loss now, with the potential to speed up any refund. The following link will take you to the IRS announcement for details: <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=186409,00.html>



Nicholas R. Bursavich
Associate—Baton Rouge
Phone: 225.381.8007
Fax: 225.387.5397
Email: nick.bursavich@bswllp.com

Mr. Bursavich is an associate with the Baton Rouge firm practicing in Casualty Litigation.