

Inside Insurance: Flood Insurance Often Neglected But Very Important **by David Colmans**

This year has already unleashed some strange weather considering the numerous early spring tornadoes, severe winter weather in the northern plains and the unusually heavy rains that continue to crisscross the South.

Of the severe weather events so far, heavy rain and flooding along with tornadoes are our chief concerns until hurricane season begins in June.

If you have home owner's or renter's insurance, the policy typically covers damage or destruction from tornadoes, fires, trees falling on our property and related injuries, it's the flooding that presents a problem.

You'll need a separate flood insurance policy to cover damage resulting from "rising water" and that means flooding.

This year, in particular, heavy rains and flooding have occurred across much of the southern states and flooding has been widespread. Flood insurance provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Flood Insurance Program, can be purchased directly from the government or it can be available through your insurance company. Many insurers sell the policies on behalf of the government.

These policies can cost very little where the risk is relatively low, but the higher the risk, the more expensive the insurance. However, the benefit is significant should flooding damage or destroy a home or business.

Caution: Flood insurance must be in effect at least 30 days prior to filing a claim. Flood insurance for a rental property would cover your personal belongings but not the building. That would be the landlord's responsibility.

Several items are important to consider. In case of flooding, follow these steps:

Beware of hazards

- Check for structural damage before re-entering your home. Contact professionals immediately if you suspect damage to water, gas, electric or sewer lines.
- Throw away food that has come in contact with floodwaters.
- Boil water until authorities declare the water supply safe to drink.

File your flood insurance claim

- Call your insurance agent who handles your flood insurance to file a claim. Have the following information at hand: the name of your insurance company (your agent may write policies for more than one company); your policy number; and a telephone number/e-mail address where you can be reached.
- Take photos of any water in the house and damaged personal property. If necessary, place these items outside the home. Your adjuster will need evidence of the damage and damaged items (e.g., cut swatches from carpeting) to prepare your repair estimate.

- List damaged or lost items and include their age and value where possible. If possible, supply receipts for those lost items to the adjuster. Officials may require disposal of damaged items. If so, try to keep a swatch or other sample of the items for the adjuster.

Clean up

- Remove wet contents immediately to prevent mold. Wet carpeting, furniture, bedding and other items holding moisture can develop mold within 24 to 48 hours.

During the first 48 hours, you can help control mold growth by cleaning with a phenolic or pine-oil cleaner (non-ammonia detergent, soap or commercial cleaner) and disinfecting with a 10 percent bleach solution (1-1/2 cups of bleach in a gallon of water). Then dry and monitor for several days. If any mold develops, throw the item away.

- Thoroughly dry out the building's interior. Portable dehumidifiers are useful and rental costs may be covered under your flood policy. An air conditioner can also be used to start the drying-out process.
- Help damaged walls dry out. If the walls are damaged, take photographs of the baseboard. Then remove it. Knock small holes at floor level in the drywall, between the wall studs. This will let moisture trapped behind the drywall seep out.
- Have your furnace checked for damage. Your water heater may work, but if the floodwater covered part of, or the entire tank, the insulation between the walls may be damaged. Obtain an estimate to replace the damaged furnace and water heater.
- Contact your local building inspections or planning office or county clerk's office to get more information on local building requirements before repairing your structure. If you can't find a local contact, call your state NFIP coordinator. Contact information can be found at www.floods.org/statepocs/stcoor.asp.

On the Web

To know more about the risk of flooding where you live, here is the Web site for the FEMA Flood Map Locator: msc.fema.gov. Enter your address and then zoom in to your street to see if there is a chance of flooding where you live.

Another excellent Web site gives county-by-county weather warnings and is constantly updated. It site provides, among other things, flood watches and warnings, tornado watches and warnings as well as other weather events: Wunderground Weather Warnings:
www.wunderground.com/severe.asp?region=se&setprefs.0.key=SVRMAP&setprefs.0.val=se#gotoMap

Intellicast.com is one of the best Web sites for viewing weather conditions. Insurance company catastrophe teams use this site, among others, to keep up with the progress of storms. You will see storms that contain hail, rotation in the clouds, an indicator of a possible tornado, weather watch boxes and even the height of the cloud tops as well as the speed and direction at which the storms are moving. Intellicast Weather Conditions:
www.intellicast.com/National/Radar/Summary.aspx?location=USGA0132&enlarge=true

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