

Having Proper Coverage is Part of Storm Preparations

By David Colmans

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Here's a really big number worth your consideration as hurricane season ramps up: \$3.04 trillion. That's the value of insured coastal property in the Southeast, stretching from South Carolina to Louisiana.

What does that mean to those who own coastal property in these states? Actually, more than you might think.

Individually, it represents the homes of hundreds of thousands of people who live full time along the Southeast coast. Whether they've been there one year or 30 years, they keep a close eye on the weather and on their property, even if they have to evacuate for the most serious storms. There also are thousands of people who don't call the Southeast home who own coastal property in one or more of these states.

Single-family homes, duplexes, condos and townhomes are, in many cases, rental properties that the owners use for a few weeks a year. Who is looking after these properties as a storm approaches?

Long-distance owners have an extra responsibility to ensure that their second homes and investment properties are always storm-ready, or to make plans in advance of an approaching storm to "batten down the hatches."

The importance of adequate building codes and structural integrity cannot be overstated when assessing a home's ability to withstand wind and water damage. The Institute for Business and Home Safety (www.disastersafety.org) and the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes (www.flash.org) are two excellent sources of information about how to build new properties and retrofit existing properties to be storm-proof, and how to prepare for storms.

As the most recent storm to hit the South, tropical storm Claudette provided another demonstration of the capability of these events. First, damaging storms can develop quickly, leaving little time for advance preparation. One day, Claudette was a tropical wave in the Caribbean; the next day it had strengthened into a tropical storm moving relatively quickly through the Florida Panhandle.

Have your storm preparation done long before a major storm heads your way. Claudette also reminds us that it's not only wind we need to be prepared for but flooding -- coastal and inland.

Flood insurance, provided by the federal government and available through your insurer, is very inexpensive for areas outside designated flood plains, but it is the only protection a homeowner has against flash floods because traditional homeowners insurance and renters insurance do not cover rising-water events.

A survey conducted last year by the Insurance Information Institute revealed that only 17 percent of residents in Southern states had purchased flood insurance.

Keep in mind that flood insurance must be in effect at least 30 days before a claim can be made. Without it, you will have to pay for the damage yourself or rely on a federal disaster loan. The bottom line: Storm preparedness and planning are essential, both for property owners who live on the coast and those who are only part-time residents.

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