

FACT SHEET 15

Claiming insurance after a natural disaster



This fact sheet is one of a series that looks at the steps you can take to give yourself the best chance of fixing or replacing your property and belongings if they're damaged or destroyed in a natural disaster, such as a bushfire, flood or storm.

See **Fact Sheet 18: Glossary** for definitions of words and terms that are in **bold text**.

To find other fact sheets in the series go to www.InsuranceCheckup.tas.gov.au or visit your local Service Tasmania for an info pack.

Stay safe and seek support

If you have experienced a natural disaster, the most important thing is to make sure you and your loved ones are safe and that you know where you can go for support.

You can get up to date information about what's happening and what support is available by checking the TasALERT website at www.tasalert.com or by listening to ABC Radio.

When a natural disaster is declared

A catastrophe declaration may be made by the Insurance Council of Australia – this means extra resources are made available to speed up the insurance **claims** process.

A disaster declaration may be made by the Australian Government – this may make extra funds available for the recovery of your community.

These declarations won't have any effect on your **insurance policy**, your **excess** or what is covered by your policy.

What to do if and when you can enter your home

If your home is damaged but not destroyed, there are a few things you can do once you are allowed by emergency services to enter your home:

- Firstly, make sure it is safe to do so. Even if the building structure is safe, there might still be chemical, bacterial, breathing or trip hazards, or other risks to your health and safety in or around the building.
- Do what you can to minimise further damage. You can organise emergency repairs to make the property safe but tell your **insurer** as soon as you can. If you are a tenant, you can organise emergency repairs to the property, but only if you are unable to contact your landlord or they don't organise repairs and the damage could get worse if repairs are not done (see **Fact Sheet 9: Renters insurance**). If you are a landlord, it is your responsibility to make the property liveable again within a reasonable time (see **Fact Sheet 10: Landlord insurance**).
- If you organise cleaning or emergency repair services, be wary of dodgy or unlicensed tradespeople offering cheap or cash-only repairs. Confirm with your insurer whether you are covered for cleaning and repair services under your policy, and check with your local council to see if a building permit or other approval is needed for any work that is done.
- If your home is unsafe, check with your insurer whether you can claim temporary housing expenses.
- Take photos or videos of damage to your property and possessions, and keep samples of materials from damaged goods as evidence to support your claim.
- Remove and discard any water or mud-damaged items that are a health risk (e.g. carpets and soft furnishings) but take photos and keep samples of fabrics and materials to show the **insurance assessor**.
- Keep any items that could be repaired – if you're not sure, talk with your insurer:

Making an insurance claim

What you should do

Below are some things you can do when you're able to make an insurance claim:

- Contact your insurer as soon as you can – even if you don't know yet exactly what you've lost. Check what is included (**inclusions**) and not included (**exclusions**) in your policy, and what the process is for making a **claim**. Don't worry if you can't find your insurance papers – insurers have electronic records and need only your name and address.
- Review your **Key Facts Sheet** and **Product Disclosure Statement** to remind yourself about the details of your policy.
- If you are in urgent financial need, ask your insurer to fast-track your claim. If your policy requires that you pay an excess upfront, ask your insurer to waive this requirement if it will cause financial stress for you. You can also ask your insurer to make an advance payment (this payment may be deducted from the total value of your claim).
- Expect an insurance assessor to inspect your property as quickly as possible to examine your situation, your loss and its value – though after a large disaster, access to your property may be limited for several days or weeks. Your insurer will let you know when to expect your assessor.
- If an insurance assessor or builder arrives unexpectedly, offering their services, check with your insurer (or your landlord if you're a renter) to confirm that the person has been appointed by the insurer, before you allow the person to start their work.
- Work with your insurer to gather quotes and agree to any works that will be done.
- Discuss with your insurer whether repairs or rebuilding works will be carried out, or whether you will receive a cash settlement.

Resources

For general information, and for calculators and other tools to help you manage your own insurance:

Understand Insurance

www.understandinsurance.com.au

Find an Insurer

www.findaninsurer.com.au

Money Smart

www.moneysmart.gov.au

What to expect from your insurer

Below are some things that you can expect your insurer to do after you have made a claim:

- Generally, insurers will let you know within 10 business days whether they will accept your claim based on the information you've given them. They may ask for more detailed information or appoint someone to get more information; if so, they'll keep you informed about what's happening with your claim.
- Insurers are expected to be reasonable in giving you information and reports about your claim.
- If the insurer denies your claim, they will provide written reasons for their decision and give you information about their complaints-handling procedure.
- There are some special considerations if a natural disaster has been declared by the Insurance Council of Australia to be a catastrophe – your insurer might not be able to meet tight deadlines if a lot of people are making claims at the same time.
- If your claim has been finalised within one month of the disaster, you have six months from the finalisation date to ask them to review your claim (e.g. if you think your loss is greater than assessed by the insurer), even if you have signed a **release**.

See *Fact Sheet 16: When things don't go well with your insurer* for information on what to do if you're not happy with the way an insurer is working with you.

Important notice

This fact sheet gives you basic and general information only. It does not cover every situation or everything you may need to know about insurance. It does not take into account your personal circumstances. Make sure you carefully read Key Facts Sheets and Product Disclosure Statements. Ask your insurer as many questions as you need in order to understand how your insurance policy will work for you. Use other tools available to you and seek professional advice if needed.

Information in these fact sheets has been drawn from a number of publicly available Government and non-Government resources.