

Tips for Preparing for an Insurance Claim

Dealing with an insurance company when filing a claim is often a relatively easy process. However, when you and your insurance company disagree whether a loss is covered, you may find the process becomes complicated and frustrating. Although you have little control over the insurance company's initial decision, you can take some steps to ensure that your claim receives the attention it deserves. If you have recently suffered a loss, here are some tips for putting together the necessary information:

1. Make any emergency repairs if necessary. If possible, photograph/document the condition of the property before making the repairs.
2. Save any receipts for supplies/materials used while making repairs or responding to the loss. Your insurance may or may not reimburse you for these purchases. However, receipts often serve as a useful reminder of dates and times when you took certain actions.
3. It is likely an insurance company employee (or adjuster) will determine the condition of your property. However, it may take some time for an adjuster to be available, particularly if your loss was the result of a wide-reaching disaster. Photographs or descriptions of the damage may be useful to explain what happened. If you disagree with the adjuster, ask your insurance company whether you are entitled to a second opinion.
4. If you have suffered a loss involving your residence, it may be useful to take an inventory of your possessions. List specific items if possible (for instance: Sony 52" Plasma TV, Model No. 4000, Frigidaire refrigerator Model #5000). If it is not practical to list specific items, list a general category and estimate the value of the property (for instance: Various Children's Toys – Approx. Value \$300, 6 Drawer Dresser with miscellaneous clothes, t-shirts, underwear and socks – Approx. Value \$500). If you can recall the cost of the item, then note that price. It may also help if you think of the cost to replace the item if you bought it today.
5. Be as organized as possible. Keep the documents concerning all of your insurance claims in a single location until the process is complete. Keep separate folders for each insurance policy or claim for disaster relief (if applicable) (for instance: State Farm Auto Insurance, State Farm Homeowner's Insurance, FEMA Disaster Relief, Flood Insurance).
6. Review your insurance policy to determine if additional expenses are covered or partially reimbursable (for instance: a rental car). If you have been displaced from your home, you may have coverage for a hotel room or other accommodations. If possible, speak to an insurance agent to confirm that the coverage applies in your situation before incurring the additional expenses. Even better, get the confirmation in writing.
7. Get in touch with your insurance agent as soon as possible to make a claim.
8. Have patience. The process may be surprisingly quick or frustratingly slow. Nothing is more difficult than being told you will receive payment within 48 hours, only to find that it is being held up for a few weeks.

Tips for Effective Documentation

Documentation is partly an art form and partly a means of recording information. One of the best ways to ensure you have the information your insurance company may need is to effectively document what happened. The more detailed your documentation, the easier the process of working with your insurance company will be.

1. Be as detailed as possible, but avoid making conclusions if you are unsure what happened. For instance, if you did not see exactly what caused the loss, just describe the extent of the damage without including your assumptions about how it happened. Be precise, include information about which you are uncertain.
2. Keep a list of your telephone conversations with insurance company employees including the date, time and name of the person with whom you spoke. Also keep a brief description of what you discussed. If you feel uncomfortable asking for a person's name after the conversation, you can begin the conversation by asking "to whom am I speaking."
3. If you are given an instruction from an insurance company employee, make a note of what you were instructed to do. When you have completed it, document the time.
4. If you have to mail something, send it via certified mail-return receipt requested. Keep the send receipt and the return receipt when you get it back.
5. If you are given any deadlines, make a note of it as soon as possible. If you have to finish something in 6 months, you might forget. It is a good idea to put the date into your calendar immediately along with a reminder a week before the deadline.
6. When a matter is finally resolved, place all the documents together. Keep the documentation for future reference, if necessary.

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