

[Insurance Consumer Rights in Ohio \(2022\)](#)

Insurance policies are contracts and legal rules come into play when you file an insurance claim. You are “the insured” and your insurance company is “the insurer.” Understanding how your insurer should handle your claim and what your rights are will help you navigate the process, be your own best advocate and collect all available policy benefits to cover your losses.

After disasters, it’s common for an insurer to rotate adjusters, which means you will have to work with multiple adjusters before your claim is resolved. Knowing your legal rights will make it easier for you deal with rotating adjusters and keep your claim on track toward a fair and full claim settlement without unreasonable delays.

Your insurance company and its employees are required to be fair and reasonable and follow state laws and regulations. They must do a timely, thorough and unbiased investigation and assessment of your loss(es) and claim. They must work with you to adjust your claim and pay what they owe in a timely and fair manner and in full compliance with the policy contract and applicable laws.

Insurance company claim adjusters are supposed to be trained on your state’s laws and claim handling regulations, but it’s often up to you to make sure they’re valuing your losses fairly, offering all benefits you’re entitled to, and following the regulations and laws in your state.

Use the guidance and sample letters you’ll find on this website to [“speak UP”](#) and collect all benefits you’re entitled to under the policy you paid for.

The information included here will give you a basic understanding of how the claim process should go and the legal rights that give you leverage to get a fair outcome. Here are the places where your rights as an insurance consumer are spelled out:

Ohio Revised Code (ORC) [Title 39 Insurance](#) provides information about the structure of an insurance company.

Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) [3901 Department of Insurance](#) provides information on the

general provisions. [Ohio Adm. Code § 3901-1-07](#) describes the Unfair Trade Practices.

Notices and bulletins issued by the [Ohio Insurance Department](#).

Claim Communications

UP strongly recommends keeping a daily claim journal. As often as possible, jot down the date, time, and details of conversations, issues, problems and agreements with the adjuster assigned to your claim and other professionals such as contractors, government agencies, etc.

Also, we strongly recommend communicating in writing with insurance company representatives so there is a clear paper trail of how your claim is being handled. These days many communications will be via email, so make sure to save those emails where you can find them. After in-person or phone conversations with insurance company representative you should send short follow-up emails or letters summarizing what was said or agreed to. Document that you're cooperating fully with the insurer. This will prevent them from blaming you for delays and confirm that you're holding up your end of the bargain.

Check out our "[Speak UP](#)" tips on being politely assertive, organized and avoiding delays and misunderstandings.

Time Frames and Deadlines

Below are timeframes and deadlines to be aware of. After a disaster, deadlines can become unrealistic due to shortages of available inspection, clean up and construction professionals. Speak UP! Document the contractors or service providers you called, who you spoke with, and what they told you in your claim journal. Sometimes following a natural disaster more work exists than skilled labor can support and it is important to document that you kept trying to find someone to help protect your property following a loss.

Processing your claim

15 Days - Your insurer must acknowledge the receipt of a claim within **15** days of receiving such notification. Your insurer may satisfy this requirement by making payment within this **15 day** period. Your insurer may also satisfy this requirement by providing necessary claims forms and complete instructions to you (the claimant). [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-54\(F\)\(2\)](#)

Communicating information to you

15 Days - Your insurer must respond within **15 days** to any communication from a claimant, when that communication suggests a response is appropriate. In the event of a lawsuit, the insurer is not obligated to respond within this **15 day** period but rather the appropriate rule of procedure for the court will apply. See [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-54\(F\)\(3\)](#).

Investigating your claim

21 Days - Your insurer must adopt and implement reasonable procedures to commence an investigation of any claim filed by either a first party or third party claimant, or by such claimant's authorized representative, within twenty-one days of receipt of notice of claim. [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-\(c\)\(4\)](#)

Paying or denying your claim

10 Days to Pay - An insurer shall tender payment to a first party claimant no later than ten days after acceptance of a claim if the amount of the claim is determined and is not in dispute, unless the settlement involves a structured settlement, action by a probate court, or other extraordinary circumstances as documented in the claim file. [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-54\(G\)\(3\)](#).

21 Days to Deny - An insurer shall within twenty-one days of the receipt of properly executed proof(s) of loss decide whether to accept or deny such claim(s). [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-54\(G\)\(1\)](#).

More time - If more time is needed to investigate the claim than the twenty-one days allow, the insurer shall notify the claimant within the twenty-one day period, and provide an explanation of the need for more time. If an extension of time is needed, the insurer has a continuing obligation to notify the claimant in writing, at least every forty-five days, of the status of the investigation and the continued

time for the investigation. [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-54\(G\)\(1\)](#).

Preserving your right to sue if necessary

There is typically a deadline in your insurance policy for filing a lawsuit related to a claim. Check your policy for a “suit against us” provision, or similarly worded provision, to find that deadline. It’s typically 12 months from the date of loss or the date your insurer closes your claim. However, the laws in your state that apply to lawsuit deadlines may extend the period stated in your policy, so it’s best to check with an experienced Ohio state attorney to avoid losing your legal rights and the leverage those rights give you to get a fair payout on a claim.

Unfair Claim Practices

Your insurer is prohibited from using unfair claim practices and/or treating you badly during the claim process. These practices are set out in the Ohio Administrative Code. The following are a few examples listed in the <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-3901-1-54> [Ohio Admin. Code § 3901-1-07\(C\)](#). **Unfair claim settlement practices defined:**

It shall be deemed an unfair or deceptive practice to commit or perform with such frequency as to indicate a general business practice any of the following:

- (1) Knowingly misrepresenting to claimants pertinent facts or policy provisions relating to coverage at issue;
 - (a) Misrepresenting a pertinent policy provision by making any payment, settlement, or offer of first party benefits, which, without explanation, does not include all amounts which should be included according to the claim filed by the first party claimant and investigated by the insurer;
 - (b) Denying a claim on the grounds of a specific policy provision, condition, or exclusion without reference to such provision, condition, or exclusion;
- (2) Failing to acknowledge pertinent communications with respect to claims arising under insurance

policies in writing, or by other means so long as an appropriate notation is made in the claim file of the insurer, within fifteen days of receiving notice of a claim in writing or otherwise;

(3) Failing to make an appropriate reply within twenty-one days of all other pertinent communications and/or any inquiries of the department of insurance respecting a claim;

(4) Failing to adopt and implement reasonable procedures to commence an investigation of any claim filed by either a first party or third party claimant, or by such claimant's authorized representative, within twenty-one days of receipt of notice of claim;

(5) Failing to mail or furnish claimant or the claimant's authorized representative, a notification of all items, statements and forms, if any, which the insurer reasonably believes will be required of such claimant, within fifteen days of receiving notice of claim, unless the insurer, based on the information then in its possession does not yet know all such requirements, then such notification shall be sent, within a reasonable time;

(6) Not offering first party or third party claimants, or their authorized representatives who have made claims which are fair and reasonable and in which liability has become reasonably clear, amounts which are fair and reasonable as shown by the insurer's investigation of the claim, providing the amounts so offered are within policy limits and in accordance with the policy provisions;

(7) Compelling insureds to institute suits to recover amounts due under its policies by offering substantially less than the amounts ultimately recovered in suits brought by them when such insureds have made claims for amounts reasonably similar to the amounts ultimately recovered;

(8) Making known to insureds or claimants a policy of appealing from arbitration awards in favor of insureds or claimants for the purpose of compelling them to accept settlements or compromises less than the amount awarded in arbitration;

(9) Attempting settlement or compromise of claims on the basis of applications which were altered without notice to, or knowledge, or consent of insureds;

(10) Attempting to settle or compromise claims for less than the amount which the insureds had been led reasonably to believe they were entitled to, by written or printed advertising material accompanying or

made part of an application;

(11) Attempting to delay the investigation or payment of claims by requiring an insured and his physician to submit a preliminary claim report and then requiring the subsequent submission of formal proof of loss forms, both of which submissions contain substantially the same information;

(12) Failing to advise the first party claimant or the claimant's authorized representative, in writing or by other means so long as an appropriate notation is made in the claim file of the insurer, of the acceptance or rejection of the claim, within twenty-one days after receipt by the insurer of a properly executed proof of loss;

(a) Failing to notify such claimant or the claimant's authorized representative, within twenty-one days after receipt of such proof of loss, that the insurer needs more time to determine whether the claim should be accepted or rejected;

(b) Failing to send a letter to such claimant or, the claimant's authorized representative, stating the need for further time to investigate the claim, if such claim remains unsettled ninety days from the date of the initial letter setting forth the need for further time to investigate;

(c) Failing to send to such claimant or authorized representative every ninety days after the first ninety-day claim investigation period, a letter setting forth the reasons additional time is needed for investigation, unless the delay is caused by factors beyond the insurer's control;

(13) Failing to advise such claimant or claimant's authorized representative, of the amount offered, if such claim is accepted in whole or in part;

(14) Refusing payments of claims solely on the basis of the insured's request to do so without making an independent evaluation of the insured's liability based upon all available information;

(15) Failing to adopt and implement reasonable standards for the proper handling of written communications, primarily expressing grievances, received by the insurer from insureds or claimants;

(16) Failing to pay any amount finally agreed upon in settlement of all or part of any claim or authorized repairs to be made upon final agreement not later than five days from the receipt of such agreement by

the insurer at the place from which the payment or authorization is to be made or from the date of the performance by the claimant of any condition set by such agreement, whichever is later.

Remedies: Filing an official complaint with your State Insurance Agency

The Ohio Department of Insurance Consumer Services Division oversees how insurance companies operate in the state. They can impose penalties on your insurance company if they did not comply with the laws in your state that require insurers to handle claims fairly and in good faith.

Visit [Insurance Resources for Ohio](#) for resources and tips on the process and strategy of filing a formal complaint.

You can call the Office of the Insurance Commissioner consumer hotline with any questions or complaints toll-free at 800-686-1526, file a complaint online, by going to <https://insurance.ohio.gov/about-us/complaint-center/file-a-consumer-complaint> select “File a Complaint” for an online form. Their mailing address is:

Ohio Department of Insurance
Consumer Services Division
50 West Town Street
Third Floor/Suite 300
Columbus, OH, 43215

Toll free 800-686-1526

Special rules that may be in place after a disaster

Check the Ohio State Office of the Insurance Commissioner’s website regularly to find all rules, regulations or other updates they may have put out that are specific to the disaster.

<https://insurance.ohio.gov/companies/product-regulation-and-actuarial-services/resources/property-casua>

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After past disasters, special rules have been put into place such as:

- Requirements that insurers advance funds for temporary expenses instead of requiring you to incur and submit receipts.
- Requirements that insurers extend deadlines for submitting proofs of loss and other documents.
- Agreements with insurers that they will accept less detailed contents inventories.

Hiring Professional Help

When you paid your premium, you paid for coverage *and* good claim service. In theory, you should not have to hire outside help to get what you already paid for. However, in reality, you may need to. You have the right to hire an attorney or public adjuster to help navigate your claim. However, we urge caution before agreeing to pay a portion of your insurance benefits to any professional, and before hiring anyone to speak for you or negotiate on your behalf with your insurance company. Only hire someone who has strong references and who is likely to add value to your claim and recover more funds more quickly than you'd be able to recover on your own.

Attorneys - If you hire an attorney to resolve an insurance claim dispute, try to hire them on a contingency (not hourly) fee basis and agree to advance litigation costs. Claim disputes are time-consuming, so it gets expensive fast when you pay by the hour. Ideally, arrange for one or two qualified attorneys to do an initial evaluation of your situation free of charge. Only hire one that has represented insurance consumers in claim disputes and is a member in good standing of the Ohio Bar. Visit our [Ohio Professional Help Directory](#). We strongly recommend reading our publication titled "[Questions and Answers for Hiring an Attorney for an Insurance Claim](#)" before making this important decision.

Public Adjusters - A qualified public adjuster can value your losses, handle the day-to-day aspects of your claim and negotiate a settlement on your behalf. Generally speaking, if you hire a public adjuster, you agree to pay them a percentage of the insurance benefits they recover on your behalf - not an hourly fee. Ohio public adjusters can also be found by visiting our [Ohio Professional Help Directory](#). We strongly recommend reading our publication titled "[Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Public Adjuster](#)"

before making this important decision.

Using the Legal System to get a Fair Settlement

If you haven't been able to get a fair insurance claim settlement on your own or with help from a professional and/or your state's insurance oversight agency, filing a lawsuit is your next option. If your lawsuit is successful, you can recover what the insurer owed and (ideally) also get compensation for the expenses you incurred chasing the policy benefits you were entitled to in the first place. Your success in using the legal system to get a fair settlement will depend on the quality of the lawyer(s) you hire, the laws in your state and the facts in your case.

It's common to worry that a lawsuit will be too time consuming or expensive (or both), but if you get the right lawyer and your case is strong, suing an insurer is often the best and only way to recover what you're owed. Finding a qualified lawyer is essential. Insurance matters require specialized expertise and you need a strong advocate who speaks the language and has previous experience litigating against an insurance company.

Start in our "[Find Help](#)" section and click on your state to find professionals who specialize in representing policyholders and support United Policyholders. You'll find many lawyers on the Internet that advertise as insurance specialists, and many of their websites have a chat window that pops up as soon as you visit their site. Speak directly to the lawyer who'd be handling your case and interview them about their insurance and litigation experience. Get and check client references. A lawsuit is a major undertaking but is often the best way to get full compensation, so be an astute consumer and choose your attorney carefully.

The cost of hiring an attorney varies from firm to firm. The two main options are attorneys who charge by the hour and those who work on contingency. For most policyholders, hiring an attorney on a "contingency" fee basis is the only feasible way of doing battle with a well-funded insurance company. Hourly fees for lawyers vary according to firm size, experience of the attorney, and geographic location. While attorneys who work on contingency usually set their fee at 33% of the amount they recover on your behalf, that may increase to 40% if your case goes to trial. Most cases settle before trial. In some states you may not have the option of hiring an attorney on a contingency fee basis.

Using the legal system gives you leverage to get a better settlement and a lawsuit is a valuable tool. For more guidance on what to consider before suing your insurance company, read [Hiring an Attorney for an Insurance Claim](#).

Best Practices

Visit and use UP's [Disaster Recovery Help Library](#) to get information throughout the recovery process:

Follow these steps:

Inventory and document your losses. Take pictures of identifiable items before they're removed for disposal or repairs before your lot gets cleared. Create detailed lists of damaged property. If your home was seriously damaged or completely destroyed, get at least one, ideally two, independent repair/replacement cost estimates.

Cooperate with your insurer as best you can and keep a good paper trail. If you are not able to stay in your home, make sure the company has an address and phone number where it can reach you.

Be present for inspections. It's a good idea to be home when the adjuster and or others inspect your property. Feel free to ask your contractor to be there with you to explain his/her opinions and estimates to the insurance company's representatives.

Make only urgent/temporary repairs before filing a claim. Your insurance company may deny your claim if you make permanent repairs before it inspects. If you're not sure if your company considers a repair to be permanent, ask your company (in writing) before starting any repair work. The cost of these repairs and for storing personal belongings is likely covered by your policy.

Keep receipts. Your insurer will usually require you to provide receipts before they'll reimburse you for expenses due to losing the use of all or part of your property. This is also true for collecting full replacement costs above depreciated/actual cash values. On our website you'll find a free expense spreadsheet to help you keep track.



Speak UP. Be politely assertive, communicate clearly, and set realistic goals during the claim process.

The information presented in this publication is for general informational purposes and is not a substitute for legal advice. If you have a specific legal issue or problem, United Policyholders recommends that you consult with an attorney. Guidance on hiring professional help can be found in the "Find Help" section of www.uphelp.org. United Policyholders does not sell insurance or certify, endorse or warrant any of the insurance products, vendors, or professionals identified on our website.

Source: <https://uphelp.org/claim-guidance-publications/insurance-consumer-rights-in-ohio-2022/> Date: July 17, 2024