

Getting a Good Insurance Settlement Takes Time

ABC 7 News

NAPA, Calif. KGO) –Many of the victims of this week’s Napa earthquake are already dealing with their insurance companies. Those that want the best settlement can expect to put in a lot of work. Getting a good settlement with an insurance company can be as difficult as negotiating a raise. It’s not easy. The major insurance companies are all out with their trailers in Napa, ready to assist homeowners with their claims. It’s a chance for quake victims to meet face to face with their adjuster.

“The insurance adjuster can give some basic steps on how to get written estimates, on how to choose multiple contractors,” Jim Klaphor from Allstate Insurance says.

Donald and Alex Pierce know what the victims of major disasters have to endure. Both barely escaped alive during the Oakland Firestorm of 1991.

“The fireman said you have to leave now and we said well we have to get the baby. And he was just, he didn’t hear me, it was so noisy and windy outside. Finally, I just looked at his eyes and said, ‘I have to get the baby,’” Alex says.

The Pierces lost their home and almost all their possessions inside. And it happened all so quickly.

“We were in the house for such a short period of time that we were unable to really collect anything,” Donald says.

It took just minutes for their home to burn to the ground. But the building process turned out to be a long and painful one.

Amy Bach is executive director of United Policy Holders, an advocacy group for the insured. She took us through the same Marina District neighborhood devastated by the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake. Bach says disaster victims shouldn’t expect their insurance company to just cut them a big check.

“If you want to get paid fairly, you got to take matters into your own hands to a degree and be your own advocate because the process is a lot more adversarial than people realize,” Bach says.

Some may find they’re underinsured and not adequately covered. Some may have difficulty with new building codes and coming up with the money to comply with those codes. Some may fall victim to

unscrupulous and unlicensed contractors. And some may find their insurance companies might low ball them in any claim settlement. That means working with independent contractors and architects to get an accurate cost of rebuilding a home.

“The people who come out where they should be after a major loss are the people who documented their claim with their own independent estimates, stuck to their guns and remain firm throughout the process,” Bach says.

Donald says he went through a lot of give and take and back and forth before settling with his insurance company.

“It’s not a fun process. It takes time. It takes dedication. It takes perseverance,” Donald says. But its work that all paid off in the end.

“I think they originally offered us \$80,000-\$90,000 less than we ended up with,” Alex says.