

[Where Helene victims can go for help rebuilding their homes and lives](#)

ConsumerAffairs

Insurance policyholders have a right to quick and full payment of claims

As homeowners struggle to recover from Hurricane Helene, most will turn to their homeowners and flood insurance for relief. The Consumer Federation of America (CFA) and United Policyholders are sharing resources and tips to help consumers get their wind and flood insurance claims paid quickly, fully, and fairly.

Policyholders are entitled to receive claims payments to the full extent of their insurance policies. Given the nature of this hurricane, it is especially important that consumers whose homes have been damaged due to wind-driven and falling rain (as opposed to flooding) collect all funds available through their home insurance policies, and those with flood insurance get paid promptly and in full.

This point always causes confusion, so it's worth repeating:

Homeowners insurance covers damage from wind, including wind-driven water;

Flood insurance covers flooding from storm surge and other rising water, like that from rivers.

State and federal officials need to hold home and flood insurance companies accountable and make sure consumers are treated fairly.

“Consumers who have been devastated by Helene have every right to get quick and full payments from their home and flood insurance policies,” said Douglas Heller, CFA’s Director of Insurance. “They have paid insurance premiums all along so that when disaster strikes as it has, they have the resources to repair and rebuild their homes and communities and their lives as quickly as possible.”

“If your home or business has been damaged, take photos of the damage, get a complete and current copy of your home, auto (and flood) policies and keep notes on all conversations with insurance company representatives and repair professionals” said Amy Bach, Executive Director of United Policyholders. “If you are being mistreated, learn your rights and speak up! It is critical to be pro-active in the insurance claim process.”

Visit UP’s Hurricane Helene Roadmap to Recovery library for more info and help at www.uphelp.org/helene.

Insured or not?

Many Helene victims will find themselves underinsured or even uninsured. Getting independent expert opinions on the cause and extent of damage is important.

While home insurance policies cover rain and wind damage from storms, damage from flooding is typically excluded. Most flood policies are sold by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), but only a small percentage of Americans carry flood insurance.

In the past, insurance companies have tried to shirk their responsibility after storms where there were both covered damage and flood damage. For example, State Farm paid a \$100 million settlement related to allegations that it improperly denied Hurricane Katrina claims or shifted responsibility to the NFIP by arguing that damage came from flooding instead of the hurricane.

And a recent investigation by CBS found that after Hurricane Ian, insurance companies changed adjusters’ estimates to shortchange impacted homeowners; this should not happen again.

CFA and United Policyholders urge Insurance Commissioners in all impacted states to monitor insurer claim handling and consumer complaints and regulate accordingly.

What to do

Insured property owners with damaged property should take the following steps:

Contact your insurance company and report your claim as quickly as possible. Depending on what caused the damage to your home, your claim may be covered by homeowners insurance or flood insurance, or both.

Document the damage in photos and videos as thoroughly as possible, but only to the extent that it is safe to do so. Try to keep damaged items from being removed before they have been photo-documented.

Keep a daily journal, noting every time you talk or interact with insurance company adjusters, repair professionals, and anyone else you are considering hiring. Note the name, date and time of the contact. Keep receipts for every cost you incur. This includes hotel and food costs if you evacuate, any alternative living arrangement costs if you cannot return to your homes, and any costs for making initial repairs to your home to prevent further damage. This may be covered under your homeowners insurance policy or your private flood insurance policy. Temporary living expenses are not covered under National Flood Insurance Program policies.

Check reference and license status before you agree to hire or assign any of your insurance benefits to any professional. Post-disaster scams are unfortunately quite common. Local help is preferable but it is not available, be careful and vet out-of-the-area pros before you sign on the dotted line.

Contact your Insurance Department and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA, for flood insurance) if you encounter problems.