

Hurricane Helene Insurance Best Practices

from Nathaniel Johnson at Granite Insurance

- **File claims ASAP**

As soon as possible, take a general inventory of your losses, and get a claim started with your carrier(s). *If you're not sure if coverage will apply, file a claim anyway.* There may be surprise bits of coverage that the assigned adjuster finds applicable. It's their job to dig in and determine coverage, and you "miss all of the shots you don't take".

- **Reduce damage**

If there is action you can take now to reduce the amount of damage to your business or home property, go ahead and take those actions. If you have applicable flood or property damage, it will reimburse you for those reasonable efforts.

- **Take pictures**

Document, document, document. Due to the widespread damage, claims adjuster visits may be delayed, which makes keeping documents, records, and pictures even more important to reference later.

- **Receipts and Documentation**

Maybe you can dig up online email receipts, order histories on websites, etc. to find items you have bought. Also, it's important to be descriptive in what you had that was damaged. Instead of putting 10 Shirts document 10 Brooks Brothers shirts. Instead of 20 pairs of socks, put 20 pairs of Columbia socks. Indicate the estimated replacement cost and be as descriptive as possible.

- **FEMA**

- In order to qualify for FEMA aid, you will be required to produce a declination of coverage from your property insurance. So, on the personal side, even if you don't have flood coverage, please file a claim with your property insurer to get that coverage declination in hand.
- *FEMA Assistance: There are multiple ways to apply, you can go online and [apply by clicking here](#), downloading [the FEMA App](#) or call 800-621-3362 from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.*
- *To view an accessible video on how to apply, visit [Three Ways to Apply for FEMA Disaster Assistance - YouTube](#).*
- You will need the following information below when you apply:

- Current phone number
- Address at the time of the disaster and the address where you are now staying
- Social Security number
- A general list of damage and losses.
- Banking information if you choose direct deposit
- If insured, the policy number or the agent and/or the company name
- If you have homeowners, renters or flood insurance, you should file a claim as soon as possible. FEMA cannot duplicate benefits for losses covered by insurance. If your policy does not cover all your disaster expenses, you may be eligible for federal assistance.
- Renters and homeowners in 25 counties in North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians who had uninsured damage or losses from Helene may be eligible for FEMA disaster assistance.
- FEMA may be able to help with serious needs, displacement, temporary lodging, basic home repair costs, personal property loss or other disaster-caused needs.

- **Employees who no longer have employment**

We understand that many of you have team members who rely on you for income. With no business operations, you sadly cannot sustain and support those employees any longer. If this is the case for you, please direct former employees to the FEMA link referenced above for help with personal housing and tell them to file for unemployment as soon as possible to begin receiving support. Alternatively, if you are working with contractors to rebuild in the meantime, consider asking those contractors if they need help – can the contractor keep them employed until you are back up and running? Many contractors will be short-staffed with all the work ahead.

- **SBA**

There is the possibility of disaster-relief SBA loans and SBA grants being available in the future. You can find more information regarding [SBA loans at this link](#). SBA grants would be directed at the regional level, and

coverage declinations from your insurance carriers may be required in this process as well, so we recommend going ahead and filing any and all possible claims with your insurers.

- **Property/homeowners policy**

If you had damage to your building outside of flooding (for example, a tree falling on it) then your property policy should be the one responding to the claim to cover damage to your building and/or personal personal property within the building.

- **Flood policy**

Flood is its own separate coverage that must be added to your insurance program, and it is not coverage that is included in the property/homeowners policy covering your building and business personal property. Many businesses and homes in the mountains don't have flood coverage in place currently, which is understandable especially when your business is elevated on a mountainside. Hurricane Helene was (hopefully) a once-in-a-lifetime type of event, crushing historic records with flooding. No one could have anticipated this level of flooding. The cost of flood insurance was a barrier and didn't make sense since most homes and businesses are not typically in a flood zone. If you are in a flood zone, you are most likely very aware of that factor given the requirements around bank loans, surveys, construction requirements and processes, etc.

- Some businesses may have **business income & extra expense** as a part of their property policy. If so, you may be able to have this additional coverage kick in to cover things like lost revenue opportunities, provide funds to keep key employees employed, and provide funds for storage unit rental (if applicable) to house your business personal property while building repairs are being done. Unfortunately, business income & extra expense coverage is not usually a part of a flood policy, so if you had flooding only and no other damage for your regular property policy to respond to, you will likely not have this available. Also, if you had no property damage but you are simply unable to operate due to the inaccessibility of roads or loss of power, unfortunately, this coverage will likely be unavailable to you because it generally requires direct property damage to your property to be triggered.

- **Earth Movement policy**

Similar to flood coverage, earth movement / earthquakes / landslides are also not covered by a typical insurance policy. If you suffered a landslide, unfortunately, this is another type of coverage that you would have had to add to your program separately.

- **Inland Marine policy**

This is a policy you may have in place for equipment that doesn't stay in one location, but moves around – think things like tractors, lawnmowers, etc. A regular property policy only covers items when they are at their “home” address/location, but an inland marine policy can cover these items when they are anywhere. If you have an inland marine policy, it is possible you can find coverage for your covered mobile equipment that was lost in the flooding. Some inland marine policies include water damage, and some exclude water damage from coverage, so this will have to be a conversation with your agent and claims adjuster.

- **Auto policy**

Did you lose your vehicles? If you had an older vehicle, you may have only had liability coverage for the vehicles, meaning you will not be able to recoup funds from insurance for these losses. However, if you had comprehensive/collision coverage for your vehicles, you should receive compensation for them whether lost in a flood or damaged by a tree fall etc.

- **Timeline**

My next question would be – how long until I can expect my insurance companies to pay our claims? Carriers are being inundated with many claims right now, and it will be a lengthy process. It will vary extremely by each insurance company. It is in your best interest to get claims started as soon as possible to be at the top of their workload. A claims adjuster should be assigned and in contact with you within a couple of days. Then, once decisions have been made regarding coverages, I would generally set an expectation of 1-3 months for claims to be paid out to you. Many insurance companies are bringing in third-party administrators to help with the workload and speed things up.