



## How To Speed The Claims Settlement Process

The Insurance Information Institute offers the following advice to speed the insurance claims settlement process:

Be prepared to give your agent or insurance company representative a description of the damage to your property. Your agent will report the loss immediately to your insurance company or to a qualified adjuster who will contact you as soon as possible in order to arrange an inspection of the damage. Make sure you give your agent a telephone number where you can be reached.

If it is safe to access the area, take photographs of the damaged property. Visual documentation will help with the claims process and will assist the adjuster in the investigation.

Prepare a detailed inventory of all damaged or destroyed personal property. Make two copies—one for yourself and one for the adjuster. Your list should be as complete as possible, including a description of the items, dates of purchase or approximate age, cost at time of purchase and estimated replacement cost.

Collect canceled checks, invoices, receipts or other papers that will assist the adjuster in obtaining the value of the destroyed property.

Make whatever temporary repairs you can. Cover broken windows and damaged roofs and walls to prevent further destruction. Save the receipts for any supplies and materials



you purchase as your insurance company will reimburse you for reasonable expenses in making temporary repairs.

Secure a detailed estimate for permanent repairs to your home or business from a licensed contractor and give it to the adjuster. The estimate should contain the proposed repairs, repair costs and replacement prices.

If your home is severely damaged and you need to find other accommodations while repairs are being made, keep a record of all

expenses, such as hotel and restaurant receipts.

### Ice Balls Can Be Dangerous

Hail is often overlooked as an insurance concern, but even small hailstones can shatter windows, smash roofs, leave pockmarks in siding and cause thousands of dollars in damage to your property, according to the Insurance Information Institute. Just imagine a golf ball dropped from an airplane flying at 30,000 feet, reaching speeds of 120 MPH as it falls to the ground. Now imagine the damage it could do if it hit the roof of your house or car. Hail can also cause serious injury and even death.

Hail damage is covered under standard homeowners insurance. It is also covered under your auto policy, provided you have comprehensive coverage.



## Are You Covered If A Tree Falls On Your House?

One of the most frequent questions the Insurance Information Institute (III) receives concerns whether their insurance covers fallen trees and branches. "The answer is quite straightforward," said Jeanne Salvatore, consumer spokesperson for the III. "If a tree hits a home or other insured structure, standard homeowners policies provide coverage for the damage the tree does to the structure and the contents within it. This includes trees felled by a windstorm, hail, weight of ice, snow or sleet."

In addition, it does not matter whether a tree was actually growing on your property. If it lands on your home, you should file a claim. After a windstorm, trees, shrubs and branches can become projectiles capable of traveling significant distances. Insurance companies don't waste time trying to locate where the tree originally lived.

"In some situations where the felled tree was located on a neighbor's property, the policyholder's insurance company may try to collect from a neighbor's insurance company in a process called subrogation. This sometimes occurs if the tree was in poor health or not properly maintained. If the insurer is successful, you may be reimbursed for the deductible," says Salvatore.

## What This Symbol Means To You ...



There is a difference in where you buy your insurance. Many don't realize there are three sources for insurance:

1. Captive Agents—who can sell you the insurance of only one company.
2. Telephone & Internet Representatives—who can offer you the insurance of one company only on the telephone or via computer.
3. Independent Insurance Agents, like us—who represent many insurance companies. We research these firms to find you the best combination of price, coverage and service for all of your insurance needs.

## Credit Card Fraud Is Most Common Type Of Identity Theft



The FTC released its annual Fraud and Identity Theft Study in January 2004 and reported that 42 percent of all complaints received were related to ID theft.

- Credit Card Fraud—33%
- Phone Or Utilities Fraud—21%
- Other ID Theft—19%
- Bank Fraud—17%
- Employment-Related Fraud—11%
- Attempted Identity Theft—8%
- Government Documents Or Benefits Fraud—8 %
- Loan Fraud—6%

### Take Action To Protect Yourself

- ▲ **In General**—Don't carry your Social Security card with you. And don't write your PINs on the back of your bank cards or credit cards.
- ▲ **Wallets**—Itemize all cards you carry in your wallet. If you make photocopies, be sure to copy the back as well, since that's usually where the contact number is.
- ▲ **Handheld Organizers**—Use a password to access all of your information. Also, create a back-up file in case your information is lost.
- ▲ **Credit Cards**—Close accounts you don't use on a regular basis (if you haven't used it in at least six months, you probably don't need it).
- ▲ **Purses**—If a purse has a shoulder strap, keep it tucked under your arm and make sure it is in your line of vision. Backpacks that are out of your sight are easy targets.

Source: Equifax