

What you need to know about homeowners insurance and water damage coverage

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4 to 5 minutes

Homeowners insurance policies cover certain types of water damage. Learn what situations qualify and ways you can prevent leaks and water damage.

There's no doubt water is powerful. It can create spectacular waterfalls and carve exquisite canyons — hopefully not in your living room. Most people don't realize that even just a few inches of water can cause tens of thousands of dollars in damage to a home.

Unfortunately, not all water damage is covered by a homeowners insurance policy.

Understanding the limits of your insurance policy, as well as the risks of water damage and how to prevent it from happening, can help ensure you have the coverage you need — no matter what happens.

What kind of water damage is covered by homeowners insurance?

As a general rule of thumb, only water damage that's "sudden and accidental" will be covered by your homeowners policy. This could include damage caused by burst pipes or accidental leaks, as well as by a fire, storm or roof leak.

*** NOT ALL COVERED ***

That said, not all water damage is covered by homeowners or renters insurance. Damage that's occurred over time or caused by intentional acts won't typically be covered, including damage caused by:

- Lack of maintenance or negligence that causes mold, mildew, moisture or wetness.
- A backed up sewer or drain.
- Earth movement, such as an earthquake, mudslide or landslide.

- Leaks from a swimming pool or other structure.
- Seepage or foundation leaks.
- Sump pump failure.

It's also important to note that homeowners insurance won't cover the cost to repair the source of the water damage, such as a broken dishwasher or washing machine.

Simple steps to prevent water damage

There are a number of ways you can avoid common leaks and prevent significant water damage in your home. For example:

- **Regularly check water hoses on household appliances** such as washing machines and refrigerators. Even a small crack can quickly become a big problem.
- **Check for drips or other leaks under sinks, dishwashers and refrigerators.** This should be done at least once per year. Check for mold, mildew or moisture on surfaces.
- **Keep an eye out for condensation and corrosion around pipes,** which indicate there may be moisture or wetness where there shouldn't be.
- **Watch for cracked or warped flooring.** It's more than a tripping hazard — it could be the sign of a leak. If you see warping on wood or tile flooring, contract a professional who can check for moisture.
- **Ensure your downspouts direct water away from the house** to prevent foundation damage or basement seepage.
- **Protect and seal your roof.** After all, it's the first line of defense for many types of water and storm damage.
- **Prevent frozen pipes** if you live in an area with extremely cold weather by wrapping them in insulation and keeping your heat set to at least 50 degrees.

- **Consider smart devices for leak detection.** Detecting a leak early can save you money, time and frustration. Smart devices can send alerts to your phone or mobile device and help you monitor your home proactively. Consider [USAA's Connected Home program](#).

Water heaters and HVAC units should also have regular professional inspections to ensure everything is in working order.

What about flood damage?

Believe it or not, most homeowners and renters insurance policies don't cover damage caused by flooding. But [USAA Renters Insurance](#) does include flood coverage.

This can be a major concern since floods are the nation's most common natural disaster,^{See note1} and even an inch of flood water can cause up to \$25,000 in damage^{See note1}.

That's where [flood insurance](#) comes in. These policies can protect you from the financial impact of flood damage in your home.

But if you think you need to live [near the coast](#) or on waterfront property to be at risk of flooding, think again. Floods can happen anywhere, and to anyone. In fact, more than 40% of flood insurance claims between 2014 and 2018 came from policy owners living outside high-risk flood areas, according to the [National Flood Insurance Program](#)^{See note1}

Some potential causes of flooding can include:

- Melting ice or snow.
- Flash floods during a drought.
- Heavy rains and storm surge from [hurricanes and tropical storms](#).
- Land development that alters natural drainage patterns.

It's also important to note that most flood insurance policies will include a 30-day waiting period before the policy is effective. That means if there's a storm already in the forecast, it may be too late to get covered.

Insurance claims for water damage

When you have water damage, you should contact your insurer as quickly as possible to ask them what steps to take to mitigate further issues and file a claim. You can also ask what actions, if any, you should take to clean up the area.

As soon as you're aware of the leaking or flooding, document the incident by taking pictures of the damage. Make sure to capture the affected area, any specific damaged items, and the source of the water, such as a roof leak or burst pipe.

Your insurer will ask questions about your claim to determine whether it's covered by your insurance. If the claim's covered, your insurer will send an insurance adjuster to assess the damage. If you need to make any urgent repairs before the adjuster arrives, take plenty of photos and keep all receipts.

Make sure you're covered.

The truth is, it's not always easy to determine whether water damage in your home will be covered by your insurance. That's why it's important to review your policy in depth, talk with your insurance provider, and make sure you have the coverage you need.

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