

FINANCIAL RECOVERY FROM A DISASTER

WHERE DO I START?

A natural disaster can strike anywhere at any time, often leaving in its wake, damage and destruction that impacts the survivor's financial well-being. You may be overwhelmed, yet anxious to put the pieces back together.

Below are helpful actions to take depending on your situation. You may not be able to return to your property until it is declared safe to do so by local officials but you can begin necessary steps towards financial recovery.

Checklist (to do before you can enter your property):

- Notify your homeowners, flood, or rental insurance company of the loss. Always report the loss even if you doubt the loss will be covered. Tell them how to best contact you for claims service. Ask if your policy covers living expenses if you cannot stay in your home or rental unit. If you lost the copy of your insurance policy request a copy.
- If you have no place to stay and the shelter is full you may be able to receive a voucher for a hotel room from the local American Red Cross or Salvation Army. If you have homeowners or renters insurance, determine if you have coverage for temporary housing.
- When feasible; contact your employer to inform them of your situation and determine time you may take off from work, if needed. Let your employer know how to best contact you.
- If an employer notifies you that your place of employment was severely damaged or destroyed and you cannot work; contact your state's unemployment insurance office. Ask about eligibility for unemployment benefits.
- If injured or disabled you may be eligible for disability insurance. Are you insured through your employer or have personal disability insurance?
- If you have natural gas service; call the natural gas company for a safety inspection *before* entering the home. Or request a natural gas shut off for safety purposes and cancel the account until gas is needed.
- If the electrical service is unsafe, *do not enter*. Call the electrical company to disconnect service until repairs can be made and electricity is needed.

For more information on documentation, see [Financial Recovery From a Disaster: Communication and Documentation is Key](#).

Find more resources for tough times at: www.extension.umn.edu/toughtimes/.

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You will need to know the extent of disaster damage before moving forward on recovery tasks. When authorities have determined that it is safe to re-enter your property, you can assess damages and begin the next few steps. It is important to document what you have done, who you have spoken with, actions to take, contacts and their contact information, deadlines for disaster assistance application, and appointments. A notebook and calendar are useful tools for documentation purposes.

Checklist (to do when you can enter your property):

- Determine if there are services to cancel for a period of time. Examples: phone, softener salt delivery, cable television, etc.
- If you are going to be out of your home or rental unit provide a change of address to your post office. This will insure that mail continues to be delivered to you.
- Notify your home mortgage company or your landlord of disaster damage to the property. Tell them how to best contact you. If you have lost the copy of your rental agreement or mortgage agreement request a copy.
- If you have vehicle damage or loss, contact your auto insurance agent. Indicate where the claims adjuster can find the vehicle. Find out how long it will take to process your claim. Ask if you have coverage for car rental. Let the agent know how to best contact you. Request a copy of your auto insurance policy if missing.
- Do not* sign anything from *any* insurance companies indicating that this is a final interaction/payment to you. Other disaster-related damages may surface weeks or months from now.
- If you anticipate having difficulty paying bills call your creditors and explain the disaster loss. Arrange payment plans *before* you get an overdue notice.
- Document all property damage and loss. Written documentation will be required for home owners or renters insurance property loss claims, to submit uncovered property losses on your income taxes, and to verify the need for assistance programs. Documentation should include: *manufacturer, model, serial number, age, value new, approximate current value and damage incurred*. Photo documentation of damage is useful to support the written documentation. Enlist family, friends, or coworkers to assist in this big task.
- Keep receipts and record all expenses related to recovery or rebuild efforts. They may be covered by insurance, assistance programs, or deductible on taxes. Remember receipts for lodging, clean-up supplies, eye glasses replacement, doctor bills related to disaster injury, etc.