



West Virginia Offices *of the* Insurance Commissioner

Checking Your Flood Insurance Policy Makes Sense *June 24, 2021*

Five years ago yesterday, on June 23 2016, heavy rains caused catastrophic flooding throughout West Virginia, killing more than 20 people and leaving thousands homeless. After a flood, we often hear homeowners who were convinced that because their property had never flooded before, they would never experience flooding. But then.....they did.

In fact, statistics show that people who live outside high-risk areas file more than 25% of flood claims nationwide. People often ask, “can I get flooding at my house?” West Virginia Insurance Commissioner Jim Dodrill’s answer? “As my good friend and colleague, Commissioner Jim Ridling of Alabama often says – if it rains at your house it can flood at your house. There’s just no simpler way to put it.”

For the best protection, a flood insurance policy available through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is a wise investment. Flood insurance will not keep rising water out of your home or business, but it will help protect the investment you have in them.

Here are some important points about flood insurance people need to understand: First, homeowner’s insurance policies generally do not cover flooding. Second, flood insurance policyholders can file a claim even if a storm doesn’t trigger a federal disaster declaration.

Many homeowners think that in the event of flooding, FEMA will come to their aid. “That’s an incorrect assumption,” says State NFIP Office director Chuck Grishaber. “FEMA grants come into play only in major disasters declared by the President of the United States and even then, they will likely not cover the cost to rebuild your home,” he said. Importantly, if you received FEMA assistance in a previous disaster, you are required to carry flood insurance on the structure forever. Failure to maintain flood insurance after receiving FEMA aid will disqualify the owner of the structure from any future assistance, even if it has changed owners.

Flood insurance is available to homeowners, business owners and renters in West Virginia communities that participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and enforce their local flood damage prevention ordinances.

Flood insurance can save homeowners thousands of dollars in repairs. FEMA calculations show that just three inches of floodwater in a home will require replacing drywall, baseboards, carpets, furniture, and other necessary repairs. If you do not have flood insurance, your out-of-pocket repair cost is estimated at approximately \$8,000. For nine to 12 inches of water, the cost jumps to an estimated \$19,000.

Obviously, the deeper the floodwater, the more it will cost – 18 inches or more of water means repairs to the electrical system and the heating and cooling system. It also means replacing doors, appliances, and cabinetry. The estimated cost of these repairs? \$26,000.

But with a flood insurance policy in force, the homeowner's out of pocket repair costs drop to hundreds, not thousands of dollars.

Homeowners can insure their homes for up to \$250,000, and contents for up to \$100,000. Renters can cover their belongings for up to \$100,000. Nonresidential property owners can insure a building and its contents for up to \$500,000 each.

An interactive guide to determine your flood risk is available online at [FloodSmart.gov](https://www.floodsmart.gov). The site also provides information on the NFIP.

Homeowners in a high-risk flood zone (or Special Flood Hazard Area) must buy flood insurance if they have a mortgage from a federally regulated lender. There is normally a 30-day waiting period when purchasing a new policy. Flood insurance is sold through private insurance companies and agents and is backed by the federal government.

There are measures a homeowner can take to lower the cost of flood insurance and minimize damage before a flood. They can add flood vents, elevate the mechanicals, or get an elevation certificate. Please contact your county/local floodplain manager or emergency management office for further guidance. You can also contact the State Office of the National Flood Insurance Program (SONFIP) at 304-414-8462.