



Consumer Alert

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Snowstorms and Insurance: What to do and what to know

What to Know

- *Damage to your home from falling trees and collapse due to the weight of ice and snow is typically covered under your [Homeowners Insurance](#) policy – but remember that neglected home maintenance can affect your claim.*
- *Damage to your vehicle is covered, but only if you have optional [Collision or Comprehensive](#) Coverage.*
- *Commercial and [Business Insurance](#) policies vary from plan to plan, but typically will provide coverage up to the policy limits for damage to the property itself along with the building's contents and liability.*

SEATTLE, February 5, 2019 – A winter storm dumped several inches of snow across Western Washington Monday night and will be followed by freezing temperatures – and possible more snow – all week. A combination of snow weighing on carports, roofs and trees, along with the thawing-and-freezing of snow and ice, can create potential hazards for homes, businesses and vehicle owners.

“From slip-sliding vehicles to water leaks, property and vehicle damage are often an unfortunate result of snowstorms,” said Kenton Brine, NW Insurance Council president. “Fortunately, in most cases, winter storm damage is covered by insurance.”

If large volumes of snow have accumulated in your area, the NW Insurance Council recommends property owners (if it is safe to do so) remove heavy snow and ice from the roofs and rain gutters of structures on your property and shovel snow from stairs and walkways. Also, check the perimeter of your property for snow that may be blocking vent pipes for furnaces, dryers and other flame-heated appliances that could cause deadly amounts of carbon monoxide to build up inside a building.

NW Insurance Council offers these coverage facts about severe winter weather damage and tips about what to do next:

What is typically covered?

Your Home

- Damage to your home from falling trees and collapse due to the weight of ice and snow. Your policy protects you regardless of whether the trees fall from your property or a neighboring property and may also provide coverage if downed trees or limbs miss your home but destroy landscaping.
- Removal of trees that have fallen on buildings.
- Damaged personal property (both home and renters) inside a damaged building.
- If you can't occupy your primary residence due to storm damage, additional living expenses are covered up to your policy limit, including increased housing costs, extra food costs, furniture rental, and storage fees.
- Costs for reasonable temporary repairs to prevent further damage to the building or contents.

Your Vehicle

- Damage caused by the weight of snow and ice and by falling trees is covered if you purchased optional [Comprehensive Coverage](#).
- Damage to your vehicle caused by collision with other vehicles – regardless of fault – or sliding into a guardrail or power pole, for example, is covered if you purchased optional [Collision Coverage](#).

Your Business

- Commercial and Business Insurance policies vary from plan to plan, but typically will provide coverage for damage from the weight of snow and ice up to the policy limits for damage to the property itself along with the building's contents and liability.

What is typically not covered?

Your Home

- In some policies, removal of trees that have fallen in your yard without damaging a building may not be covered – check with your insurance company or agent.
- Upgrades that weren't part of your home before the storm.
- Damage to your home that can be reasonably attributed to the homeowner's failure to do proper routine maintenance, such as clearing leaves/debris from rain gutters or fixing known leaks around windows or roof flashing.

Your Vehicle

- Damage to your vehicle if you don't have Collision or Comprehensive Coverage.

What to do if your home or vehicle has been damaged:

- Document damage and take pictures.
- If safe to do so, make temporary repairs to your home or business to prevent further loss from rain or snow. Save receipts for reimbursement.
- Contact your insurance agent or company to file a claim immediately. Filing a claim quickly enables your insurance company to get to you sooner.

- Use only licensed, reputable building contractors for repairs and be sure they get the proper building permits.
- If you're involved in an auto accident, notify your insurance agent or company immediately to file an insurance claim. Ask what documents are needed to support your claim. Keep records of your expenses related to the accident because they may be reimbursable under your policy. Also, maintain copies of all your paperwork, including the police report and repair estimates.
- Develop a [home inventory](#) of your personal property. A complete inventory of your possessions will help you and your adjuster get through the claims process more quickly.

What to avoid if your home has been damaged:

- Avoid contractors who ask for a large deposit up front or bids that are remarkably low. This may indicate a willingness to cut corners or leave work unfinished.
- Don't pay a lot for temporary repairs unless authorized by your insurance adjuster. You could get stuck with the bill if the repairs are deemed excessive.
- Don't discard anything that is damaged until it has been examined by your adjuster. You could miss out on coverage for that item.

If you'd like more information on how to protect your family and property from landslides, flood, high winds and snow storms contact the [NW Insurance Council](#) at (800) 664-4942.

NW Insurance Council is a nonprofit, insurer-supported organization providing information about home, auto and business insurance to consumers, media and public policymakers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Visit our new website today: www.nwinsurance.org.

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