



# THE PROPERTY **DAMAGE** INSURANCE **GUIDE**

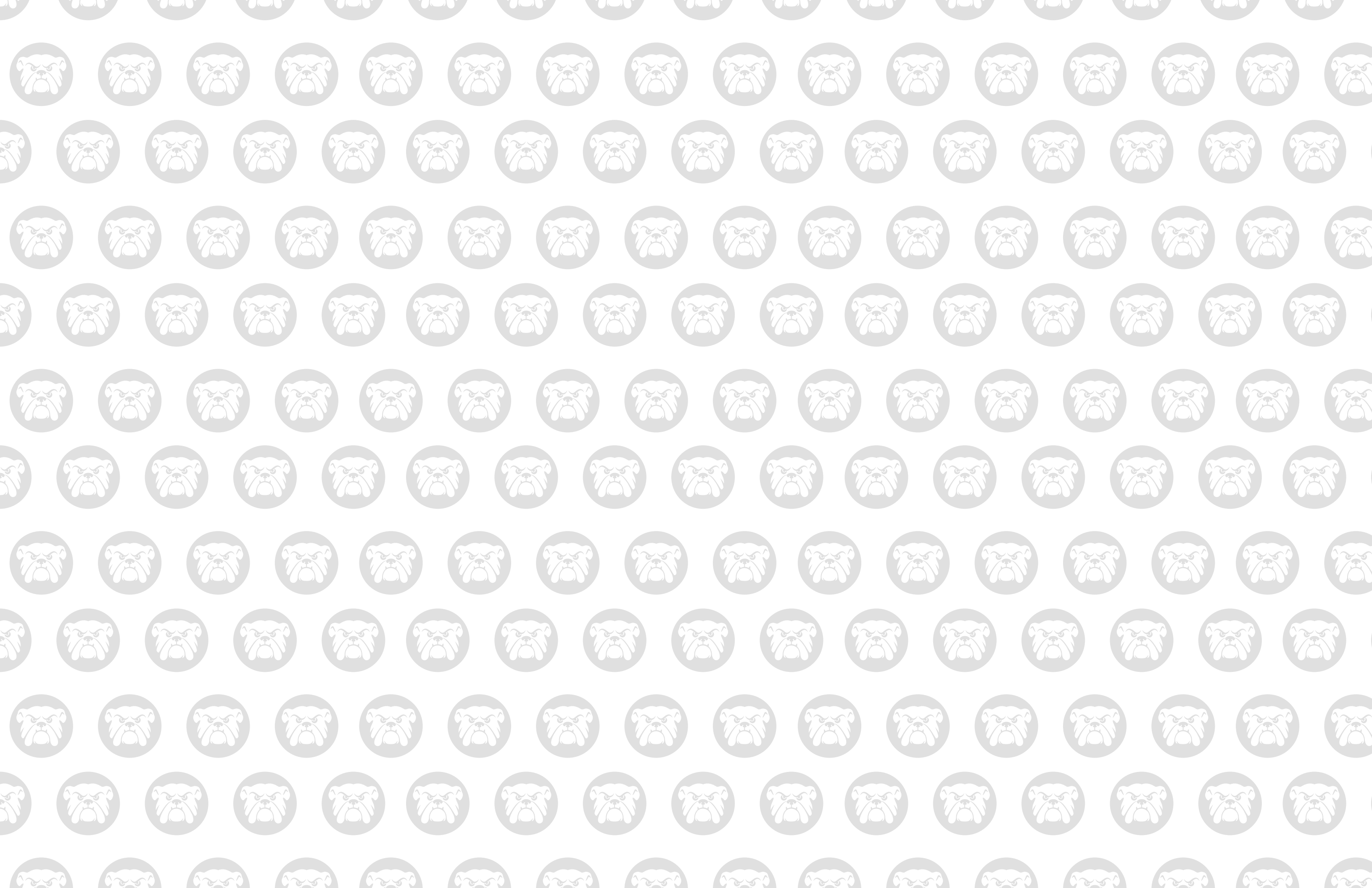
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# The Basics of Property Insurance.

Buying a property is the largest investment you will ever make. It will not only be the place where you and your family live, but it is also what protects you from the elements, what offers you comfort and warmth, and what you can someday sell as your family's needs change. Because a home is so valuable, it is essential to protect it with homeowners' insurance.

## Why you have it

As with any other large investment, protecting your property with insurance can potentially save you thousands of dollars if you ever have property damage and need to file an insurance claim. You worked hard for years and years to build a solid financial footing for your family and you need to do everything you can to protect one of your largest assets. Accidents, criminal activity, and disasters can and do happen. Someone may accidentally damage your property by driving into your house/office. Your property could be broken into and looted. A violent snowstorm that causes feet of snow and ice could damage any part of your structure. If you don't have adequate protection, you could face financial ruin. You need insurance to protect the roof over your head.

## Why you need it

Property damage happens, It's inevitable. No matter how much we try to prepare our property, damage will happen to us. When you experience a loss that is covered by your insurance policy, the insurance company will pay for losses according to the terms of the policy. Most policies cover a specific list of disasters or "perils", including weather-related damages and damage caused by other people. Your policy will specifically describe the losses that are covered, exclusions from coverage, and coverage limits. For instance, if your home or property is burglarized, and you don't have

the correct type of property insurance with coverage for personal property, you can never Recover What you lost or the money it would take to replace it. The same is also true if you should have luxury items in your home but you didn't purchase specific coverage for those items.

## What's important

So, what should you look for in coverage? Many people forget about the inside of the property and just get coverage on the property itself. However, coverage for your personal items within a given property is just as important. Should you lose your property in a fire or burglary, you want to have the means to replace it. Depending on the policy you choose, you could get a settlement that covers the current market value of your property or the value of the property with depreciation.

Also, you need to consider the area you own property. Are you in a flood zone? Are hurricanes a concern? Do you live in Tornado Alley where storm damage is expected? Do you live on a golf course? Is vandalism a problem in your neighborhood? Do you live in a dry area that experiences brush fires? If you are in a high-risk area (no matter which risk), you need to purchase additional coverage for such events (floods, fires, etc.).

Perhaps one of the most important parts of property insurance – and the most missed – is liability: coverage to protect you if someone is injured on your property. If you have a holiday party, for example, and you don't put down salt on your slippery sidewalk, a person who slips and falls and breaks an arm can sue you not only for medical expenses but for lost wages as well. These are all important things to remember and consider when you purchase an insurance policy.



# HOME INSURANCE PROPERTY DAMAGE

## Terms You Need to Know

### Actual cash value

Value of property before it was destroyed or damaged, minus depreciation (loss of value over time).

### Additional living expenses

A provision that pays for extra living expenses while a home or property is undergoing reconstruction. Covered expenses may include costs for moving, hotel accommodations, rent, restaurant meals, and laundry.

### All risks policy

Protection against damage or loss of property from any peril, except those that are explicitly excluded.

### Appraisal

The process of which the value of the loss is determined by a panel.

### Contents coverage

Insurance for contents and belongings worn or carried by the homeowner or property owner and other covered individuals.

### Coverage A

The portion of a home or property insurance policy that covers damage or destruction of a home or property's structure, including its walls, roof, flooring, doors, windows, and more.

### Coverage B

The portion of a home or property insurance policy that covers detached structures, such as a detached garage, shed, fence, or guesthouse.

### Coverage C

The portion of a home or property insurance policy that covers personal belongings.

### Coverage D

The portion of a home or property insurance policy that covers additional living expenses if the home or property is uninhabitable while undergoing repairs after a disaster.

### Declarations

A section of the home or property insurance policy that summarizes coverage details. Included are the names of the insured, the policy effective dates, amount of coverage, deductibles, and endorsements.

### Deductible

The portion of the loss that the homeowner is responsible for that is subtracted from the insurance company payment.

### Depreciation

A decrease in a covered item's value due to age and deteriorating condition.

### Earthquake insurance

Insurance that protects against losses caused by earthquakes. Earthquake insurance coverage is available as a separate policy or as an endorsement.

### Effective age

An appraiser's estimate of a structure's age based on its current condition, rather than its actual age. The effective age considers how well a property has been maintained and does not usually match the chronological age.

### Endorsement

A document added to an insurance policy to add or restrict coverage.

### Exclusion

A restriction in an insurance policy that eliminates coverage for certain perils, people, property, or locations. Typically, exclusions in a standard home or property insurance policy would include floods and earthquakes.

### FAIR plans

State-run insurance plans designed to provide property insurance to people in high-risk areas who might not otherwise be able to get coverage.

### Flood insurance

A special policy that provides protection against damage caused by floods. Flood insurance is backed and administered by the federal government through its National Flood Insurance Program.

### Grace period

The period of time an insurance policy remains in effect after the premium due date has passed without a payment being made (usually 2 weeks).

### Home insurance

The policy covers the house, garage, and other structures on the property and personal belongings against fire, theft, wind, and a variety of other perils.

### Home inventory

A record of personal possessions for home, condo, or renters insurance purposes. The inventory can include written information as well as video recordings and photographs of belongings.

### Independent adjuster

An independent contractor who investigates and settles claims for insurance companies. An independent adjuster works on contract by third parties but is not employed by insurance companies or the agent who sells you your policy.

### Individual policy

A home insurance policy sold directly to an individual.

### Insurance binder

A document that provides temporary proof of insurance coverage issued to cover the property until a formal policy is issued.

### Lapse

The discontinuation of an insurance policy because the premium was not paid before the end of the grace period. If the damage occurred when you had a lapse of coverage, even if it was fixed afterwards, you are still not covered for that loss that occurred during your lapse of coverage.

### Liability coverage

Insurance coverage that pays for damage or injuries a policyholder accidentally causes to others. These are the legal responsibility of the policyholder.

### Loss of use

A provision that pays for the loss of rental income while a home or property is undergoing reconstruction. The inability to use a home or property while it's being repaired or rebuilt after a disaster.

### Market value

The estimated price for which a property can be expected to sell in the open market.

### Master policy

Insurance that covers the common areas of a condominium complex, such as building exteriors, pools, hallways, and grounds. The master policy, funded by residents' monthly dues, is a collective policy that does not cover personal belongings.

### Nonrenewal

A notice by an insurance company that it will not renew a policy when the term expires.

### Personal property

Personal belongings not attached to the structure of the home or property, such as furniture, clothing, artwork, and appliances.

### Public insurance adjuster

An adjuster who works on behalf of policyholders to help them evaluate damage and rebuilding costs after a loss, and to guide them through the insurance claims process and settle their claims. Public adjusters usually charge a percentage of the amount recovered, this may vary from state to state.

### Replacement cost coverage

Insurance that pays to replace damaged or destroyed belongings with new items.

### Rider

Insurance that provides additional coverage for personal belongings. Standard home or property insurance policies set dollar limits on coverage for valuables. A policyholder with a large fine art collection would need to buy a floater to cover the full value of the artwork.

### Scheduled items

Valuables covered by additional insurance protection in a rider on a home, condo, or renters insurance policy. Standard insurance policies provide a limited coverage amount for costlier items, such as jewelry, artwork, antiques, and firearms. Scheduling such items increases the policyholder's level of insurance coverage.

### Umbrella liability

A liability insurance policy that provides additional protection beyond what is provided in car, home, renters, or condo insurance policies.

### Underwriter

The insurance company that assumes risk and issues the policy. It also refers to an insurance company professional who determines how to classify an insurance applicant's risk level and whether the risk is worth assuming.





# DO I HAVE ENOUGH COVERAGE

Your coverage needs depend on what your property looks like. So how do you make sure that you've got the right amount? We recommend that you speak to a licensed insurance agent in order to make sure that you get the right coverage. Your coverage needs to include your home or other property, any outbuildings, and personal property such as jewelry, antiques, or other items with higher values.

## **Dwelling coverage**

This coverage is meant to help you rebuild your property if it burns down, gets crushed by debris in a windstorm, or explodes without warning from a gas leak. Think about the structure of your house, the materials used to build it, and attachments like a garage, front porch, or deck. Your dwelling coverage needs to equal the replacement cost of your house— in other words, what would it cost to build a replica of your home. Calculating the replacement cost can be complicated. For a good estimate, use these three steps to calculate the closest estimate:

*First*, take the square footage of your property and multiply it by local construction costs. You can find these costs on most construction companies' websites. These sites include costs like materials and labor.

*Second*, use an online calculator to get a second estimate. There are free online calculators that use your property's square footage, building materials, and the total number of rooms.

*Third*, once you have an estimate, ask a professional for theirs. An expert independent insurance agent will know the local area and can calculate an estimate of the replacement cost.

Once you have an accurate replacement cost, review it every couple of years. To do that, be sure to include these five factors that affect replacement costs.

## **New Building Codes**

If you lose your current property, your new property will have to meet up-to-date building codes, which could increase the cost because of new safety features. Insurance companies can offer building code coverage to help you pay for whatever the new codes require. However, that coverage is in addition to your standard property insurance policy. You have to request it and have it added to your master policy when you purchase it.

## **Renovated Kitchens**

Kitchen renovations change property values – sometimes drastically. Quartz countertops, ceramic farm sinks, shaker style cabinets, robust flooring— you should adjust your property insurance to match the increase in your property's value. So, if you spent \$30,000 renovating the kitchen, your adjustment should include not only the \$30,000, but the added value, which can be determined by a real estate agent.

## **Room and Structural Additions**

New rooms and renovated spaces add value, and unless you update your property insurance to include these, you risk having to pay for them again. A home's value with an unfinished basement is far less than a home with a finished basement, for example. Or maybe you added a room for your growing family or business, or perhaps you simply added on to add value to your property. Whatever the case, make certain those adjustments are

made to your policy when you complete the additions or renovations.

**Rising Construction Costs**

Not only are materials going to be more expensive – like bricks, timber, and stone – but if your local area experienced a natural disaster, this would increase demand and lower supplies. Along with materials, workers’ wages may go up, and construction costs often go up right alongside them. If your property is older than 10 years, you can expect a significant difference in costs for rebuilding or repairing your home.

**Old and Unreplaceable Features**

Building styles change over time, and the number of carpenters who know how to create unique features, especially features that need specialized craftsmen, will dwindle. This would apply if your home has features you simply don’t see in modern buildings, such as archways, pocket doors, laundry chutes, coffered ceilings, glass doorknobs, and more.

**Personal Property Coverage**

Once you’ve determined the coverage for the structure of your property, it’s time to get personal property coverage. This applies to your furniture, appliances, electronics, clothes, sports equipment, dishes, and even your food. Always make sure you have enough personal property coverage to replace all your belongings. And don’t forget that extra deep freezer you’ve been stockpiling food in. People can lose hundreds or thousands of dollars’ worth of food in power outages or through other property damage. It’s also true that most people underestimate

how much they own. People lose sight of the value of their belongings. You don’t want to risk being underinsured for personal property and end up with a reimbursement check that can’t replace all the losses. Start with an inventory of everything you own. Start at one end of the property and work your way to the other end. Don’t skip any room – even the bathrooms! Take photos, make notes, and document each possession, especially expensive items. And be detailed! Don’t simply put on your inventory “oven” or “painting”. You will not be properly reimbursed for a Viking 48 Inch Wide 6.1 Cu. Ft. Natural Gas Range valued at \$16,939 based on the word “oven”. The most you would get is the baseline model cost of \$500. And you certainly won’t get reimbursed for a modern art piece valued at \$20,000 just by using the word “painting”.

Personal property coverage does have its limits. If you own artwork, expensive jewelry, or some high-end sports equipment, you’ll need additional coverage. Keep those items separate from your inventory and write down the estimated replacement costs of those items. Your insurance agent may let you know if you need an additional policy for them.

**Liability Coverage**

Once your property and possessions are properly insured, it’s time to load up on liability coverage. Liability is the part of your property insurance that covers expenses if someone is injured on your property, including accidental falls, falling ill after a visit or even dog bites. With liability, insurance will cover accidents that happen on your property, so you don’t have to pay medical bills or participate in lawsuits.

Most property insurance policies come with a minimum of \$100,000 in liability coverage. But you should really consider buying \$300,000- \$500,000 if you can. This is especially true if you have kids and you know their friends will be playing on your property. Kids hurt themselves all the time. One thing to make note of: not all dogs are covered under property insurance. In fact, if you own a dog breed that has been flagged by insurance companies as high-risk, anything that happens which involves your dog won’t be covered.

- Akita
- Cane Corso
- Pit bulls
- Doberman Pinschers
- Rottweilers
- Chows
- Great Danes
- German Shepherds
- Siberian Huskies
- Alaskan Malamutes
- Wolf-dog Hybrids (Mastiffs)
- Any mix of these breeds

If you are looking to get a family dog, carefully consider the liability implications should you choose one of the above breeds. Additionally, should you choose to have exotic pets in the home, they may also not be covered. Tigers, ferrets, monkeys, snakes, arachnids, and other exotic creatures may require an endorsement or rider to ensure coverage against bites or other injuries to your guests.

**Additional Living Expenses (ALE) Coverage**

Additional living expenses (ALE) coverage is like a super emergency fund that reimburses you for the added costs of living without a home. So, if your monthly mortgage is \$800 and staying in an extended living hotel is \$1200 per month, ALE will reimburse you the extra \$400.

If you have a large family that would require extensive costs for housing and feeding if your home needed rebuilding, consider getting additional ALE coverage. You want to be certain that you have the funds to help your family of 6 stay comfortably in multiple rooms and have enough money for feeding everyone as well.



# The Different Types of DAMAGE COVERAGE

New property owners might wonder what different types of damage coverage are available (such as coverage for sinkholes, flooding, damage to external structures on your property like sheds, gazebos, etc.) to include in your property insurance policy.

People who own a home or property can get a standard insurance policy that will protect against the 16 disasters or perils listed below (these are standard for the industry, but you need to verify these when you purchase a policy):

- Fire or lightning
  - Windstorm or hail
  - Explosion
  - Riot or civil commotion
  - Damage caused by aircraft
  - Damage caused by vehicles
  - Smoke
  - Vandalism or malicious mischief
  - Theft
  - Volcanic eruption
  - Falling object
  - Weight of ice, snow, or sleet
- Accidental discharge or overflow of water or steam from within a plumbing, heating, air conditioning, or automatic fire-protection sprinkler system, or from a household appliance
- Sudden and accidental tearing apart, cracking, burning, or bulging of a steam or hot water heating system, an air conditioning or automatic fire-protection system
- Freezing of a plumbing, heating, air conditioning or automatic, fire-protection sprinkler system, or of a household appliance

- Sudden and accidental damage from artificially generated electrical current (does not include loss to a tube, transistor, or similar electronic component).

## **Levels of Coverage**

There are three coverage options when purchasing a policy:

### *Actual Cash Value*

This policy pays to replace everything minus deductions for depreciation.

### *Replacement Cost*

This pays the cost of rebuilding the home, repairing the home, or replacing personal property without depreciation (so, current market value).

### *Guaranteed/Extended Replacement Cost*

A guaranteed replacement cost policy pays whatever it costs to rebuild the home as it stood originally—even if it exceeds the policy limit. This gives protection against sudden increases in construction costs or a shortage of building materials after a widespread disaster. It doesn't necessarily pay for upgrading the structure to comply with current building codes. However, you can add an endorsement for that.

## **Other Disasters or Perils**

### *Sinkholes*

When property insurance policies are estimated, the real estate value of the land is excluded; only the cost of rebuilding the property is considered. As a result, most property insurance policies in the U.S. exclude

damage related to the movement of the earth and you must purchase that insurance separately. Sinkholes are hard to predict, difficult to investigate, and outrageously expensive to repair. If you live in an area with potential for sinkholes, you can get an endorsement or additional coverage added to your policy.

### *Flooding*

As a general rule, property insurance does not cover flood damage. Know what the risk of flooding is in your property's area and what options your insurance offers. If you live in a designated flood zone, you undoubtedly need flood insurance. If you think you might need flood insurance, investigate flood insurance right away as there is a 30-day waiting period on the coverage effectiveness.

### *External Structures*

The following are other structures you might have on your property that qualify as external structures typically covered by homeowners insurance:

- A fence
- A gazebo
- A detached garage
- An in-ground swimming pool

Detached structures on your property are usually covered for the same things as your home. However, make sure to read your policy carefully to determine coverage for outbuildings or other external structures.

# GENERAL APPLIANCES & MAINTENANCE

We know that property insurance covers many things – but what about appliances or maintenance? Do standard property insurance policies cover air conditioning replacement or repair? Do insurance policies cover the repair and replacement of water heaters? What if a kitchen appliance suddenly breaks? As with other coverage, make sure you review your specific insurance policy to be sure it includes coverage for appliances. There's a good chance it will. There are a few common ways appliances are covered.

**Water damage:** There are appliances that leak water when they break down, leading to potential damages. Valves might burst over time, fittings may loosen, or the unit could be rusted through. Whatever the cause, property insurance covers the water damage aspect. Furniture and carpet cleanup: If a broken appliance leaks water, you could have some furniture and carpeting that gets soaked, leading to potential mildew. Coverage will pay for the cleanup, but it may not pay the full replacement value for your carpet – only its depreciated value.

**Wood flooring:** Wood flooring that must be torn up and replaced is covered under property insurance.

**Theft:** If someone steals an appliance from your property, this is covered under the personal property section.

Damage or destruction (covered perils): Certain natural disasters, like lightning, hail, windstorms, and fires, are standard coverage and include damage to your appliances. Explosions are another covered peril, so if your appliance explodes, your policy may cover its replacement as well as the surrounding damage.

Always speak with your insurance agent to review your specific property insurance policy and help you understand exactly what kind of coverage you have regarding appliances.



# YOUR PROPERTY & YOUR COVERAGE

(Windows and  
Doors, Slab,  
Structure, Roof,  
and Walls)

You may wonder what is covered in terms of the physical property: windows, doors, slab or structural issues, roof, ceiling, and walls. Will your policy cover damage to these areas, including wear and tear, or do you need additional protection?

A standard property insurance policy pays to repair or rebuild your property due to damage or destruction by fire, hail, hurricane, lightning, or other perils listed in the policy. Most policies also cover detached structures for about 10% of the amount of insurance you have on the house. Standard policies do not pay for damage from floods, earthquakes, sinkholes, or routine wear and tear. Always have enough coverage to rebuild your property.

Some people might wonder if windows and doors are always considered part of the structure: yes, they are. However, if you suffer damage due to deteriorating windows or doors, those damages won't be covered. For example, if you haven't been maintaining your windows, the sealant rots, and you get a leak during a rainstorm. Damage from that leak will NOT be covered because you failed to maintain the windows.

It is up to the property owner to properly maintain the property in order to write a legitimate claim for damage. Any damage that can be related to worn out items, damaged property that you were responsible for fixing, or other issues related to wear and tear are not covered by a standard property insurance policy.



# OUTSIDE FORCES

**There are some external sources of damage that may or may not be covered by your insurance policy: Arson, Vandalism, Theft, and Golf Balls.**

## Arson

When you take out insurance on your property, you will usually have fire insurance. It is standard to exclude covering fires caused by arson. This exclusion is there to prevent someone from burning their own property down to collect insurance payouts.

There is a risk that insurance companies will abuse this provision to avoid paying a claim. A person can have a legitimate fire insurance claim but end up with nothing because the insurance company stubbornly insists that the fire was arson. Should you have a house fire, work closely with the investigators to ensure that the cause of the fire is found and properly listed in the report.

## Vandalism

Vandalism is usually covered under an all-perils policy unless specifically excluded. Vandalism coverage applies to both occupied and unoccupied properties but not to vacant properties that are considered abandoned. An unoccupied property is simply one where no one is living on the property at the time of the vandalism. A vacant property is empty, and no one is coming and going nor is there property inside the property. If you moved or were selling your property, leaving it sitting empty, make sure you contact your agent about maintaining coverage for liability, damage, and vandalism.

## Theft

Theft is covered under personal property coverage and may be the most important coverage your policy has. Standard policies will reimburse the property owner the full amount of normal-priced goods, like kitchen equipment, video game decks, computers, cell phones, and your clothing.

However, if you have valuables in your property worth thousands of dollars (jewels, artwork, expensive electronics), make sure you talk with your agent about adding an endorsement or rider to your policy to cover those items specifically.

## Golf Balls

If you live on or near a golf course, broken windows, roof damage, or dings to exterior walls (all caused by errant shots) should expect to have such damage covered by property insurance policies. Should you be injured by a flying golf ball, broken club, or clubhead that found its way loose, the property insurance policy of the golfer should cover your expenses (under liability).



# How to File YOUR CLAIM

## Pre-Filing

Before you file a claim, it is essential to gather all relevant documentation, affidavits, statements, police reports, or other information related to your claim. Start by reviewing your policy. Make sure you are familiar with all the provisions in your policy, including the deductible, whether you have replacement cost or actual cash value, and additional coverage for luxury items. Once you are certain the damage or loss is covered, contact your property insurance company right away. It is standard that most insurance companies require you to file a claim within a year of the incident. Filing quickly also helps you dodge delays, especially if your property damage was just one of many properties damaged in a regional disaster.

## Filing

Each insurance company has its own procedure for filing a claim. They will each have their own forms and deadlines for filing. Prior to filing, make sure you complete each of the necessary steps below:

### FILE A POLICE REPORT

Should your property be burglarized, file a police report immediately. The police report will be essential in filing a theft claim as it helps to verify the details of the theft.

### CONTACT YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY

Call your insurance company and tell them what happened. This first contact with the insurance company will likely tell you if the loss is covered by your policy and the deadline for filing a claim. The insurance professional on the phone may also give you an estimate of

the loss amount and how it compares to your deductible. Make sure you ask questions – lots of questions. Take notes, record the time and date of the phone call, its duration, and the full name of who you spoke to at the insurance company. Keeping copious records will only help you through the claim process. But, don't let them get disorganized. Keep everything in one place and in chronological order.

### FILL OUT THE CLAIM

After the initial contact with the insurance company, it is time to file the claim. This may be a simple, online document or a document emailed to you for completion. One of the documents is your proof-of-loss form. This is where you provide your personal information,

what caused the loss, what part of the house or property you're claiming a loss on, and the estimated loss in dollars. It is also wise to include photos or video evidence of the damage when you file the claim.

By law, you must have the claim forms returned within a certain time frame after your initial contact with the company. The faster you fill out the paperwork and send it back to your insurer, the less likely you are to experience delays.

### PROVIDE DOCUMENTATION OF EVERYTHING

If you have a claim for personal property loss, you must substantiate the loss before you'll be reimbursed. Keep receipts, a list, or a property inventory that verifies the value and description of items that have been damaged or stolen. This will improve your chances of getting a full reimbursement.

### MAKE TEMPORARY REPAIRS

It's possible that any damage to the structure of your property could result in further damage. For instance, if you find a leak or a hole in the siding, make temporary repairs to avoid any further damage. Also, keep your repair receipts to ensure you are reimbursed by the insurance company once the claim is paid out.

### PREPARE FOR THE INSURANCE ADJUSTER

Your claim will most likely require a visit from the insurance adjuster, especially for claims that involve damage to the structure of your property. The adjuster assesses the damage and confirms details of the claim before proceeding to reimbursement. Inspections typically include the following steps:

#### 1. Confirming coverage

#### 2. Detailed inspection of the property's structure

#### 3. Providing the adjuster with any documentation, like receipts, photos, or a property inventory (give them copies – keep your originals).

#### 4. If it's a liability claim, provide the adjuster with contact information for physicians, attorneys, witnesses, or anyone involved with the claim

#### 5. A thorough interview with the policyholder



# Filing

As the policyholder, make sure the adjuster is thorough, fully inspecting everything regarding the loss. Make sure they take photos, and invite them to review all the paperwork you provided while they are still on your property so you can answer any questions or provide any additional information they may need to fully process your claim.

## RECEIVE THE CLAIM PAYOUT AND COMPLETE REPAIRS

After your claim is approved, and you receive your settlement amount, it's time to start thinking about repairs. If you hold a mortgage on the property, the insurance company will

## OBTAIN REPAIR OR REBUILD ESTIMATES FROM CONTRACTORS IN YOUR AREA

No matter what the damage, if you want to ensure a fair settlement, you need to get estimates from contractors, roofing companies, window installers, plumbers, or appraisers (this all depends on how bad the damage is). Having those estimates from licensed contractors in hand will offer you more leverage if your insurance company tries to low-ball your settlement amount.

send out checks to both you and to the lender listed on the insurance policy. When there is damage to the property's structure, the lender gets equal rights to the insurance check to ensure that necessary repairs are being made to the investment property. Your mortgage company will usually put this money into an escrow account and send out funds for payment as work on the repairs are completed.

While you can always hope that the claim process goes smoothly, if you don't follow up on a regular basis, your claim could get lost "in process" or simply be put to the side. In the case of property owner's claims, it is critical that you, the policyholder, always keep the insurance company on its toes.

When your insurance company comes to you with an estimate for repairs, review it very carefully. Don't just accept the first offer. Many companies are completely trustworthy and will treat you fairly. But just as many will do everything in their power to lowball you and pay out as little as possible on any claim. If you have your own estimates, you are far more likely to receive an appropriate settlement.

# What to Expect

**Industry standards determine that insurance companies should act in good faith and deal fairly through the following steps.**

**Providing** prompt, ongoing communication with the insured. ●

**Defending the insured** in any liability action where the claim is covered ●

Acknowledging, investigating, and either **approving or denying an insurance claim** within a reasonable amount of time ●

Producing prompt, fair, and **equitable settlements** of claims ●

Proving **detailed reasons** for denying an insurance claim. ●

Failure to abide by these standards could give you grounds to sue your insurance company for bad faith. If you are uncertain about the integrity of your insurance policy carrier, it would be a good idea to contact a public adjuster for a free inspection. Most public adjusters will do a free inspection, examine your policy with a fine-tooth comb, and then help you get the maximum settlement you're entitled to, based on your policy.

## The Downsides of a Claim Denial

After you've **done everything by the book, provided all documentation in a timely manner, participated in your adjuster investigation, and filed your claim on time**, you get a letter of denial. **Nothing could be more frustrating!** There are certain steps you should take in appealing your denial.

### *Be Professional*

If you need to dispute a denial or underpaid settlement offer, begin with a letter to your claims adjuster. Tell your adjuster how things look from your angle, including any evidence that supports your claim, and request that the claim be reviewed. Politely ask that this be done as quickly as possible and set a time period – for instance, 7-10 business days. Make sure to send your letter via certified mail so you have a receipt and know when they receive the letter.

It would also be prudent to send a copy of your letter and documents to your adjuster's supervisor, also by certified mail. Don't make threats right away, such as "Wait until you hear from my lawyer!" This will only encourage the insurance company to turn your claim over to its own legal department, which will result in lengthy delays.

### *Invite the Adjuster Back to the Property*

We're all human and everyone makes mistakes. There is nothing wrong with asking the adjuster to do another inspection. If you've secured second opinions from independent contractors or other professionals, have those people meet with the adjuster as well. When you have the evidence on your side, it is harder for the insurance company to deny your claim. If these steps don't work, look for a public adjuster you can hire.



# Benefits of hiring a PUBLIC ADJUSTER

One of the best ways to revert denied claims is to hire a public adjuster like the ones that work with Bulldog Adjusters. Public adjusters are professionals in the insurance industry and are experts at filing claims on behalf of policyholders. We don't just file the claim, however, we also get policyholders the highest settlement possible! Once you contact one, they will act as your advocate, filing the entire claim for you and facilitating all communication between you and the insurance company.

Public adjusters cannot force settlement checks to be written but you are more likely to have the best possible outcome when working with a public adjuster. You don't want to take on the insurance industry alone. Public adjusters are experts in the process of filing claims and dealing with insurance company adjusters. It is most beneficial to hire a public adjuster as soon as you discover damage. It's best to reach out within 48 hours of damage to your property.

The first thing that your public adjuster will most likely do is assess the damage or loss that you have experienced within your

property. From there, they will be able to come up with an evaluation and determine a fair cost to get your property fully repaired.

On top of making these professional assessments and letting you know what you should expect, they will file your insurance claim for you using their knowledge of the insurance industry. Once your adjuster submits your claim, they will communicate with your insurance company on your behalf, relieving property owners of the burden of constantly calling up and following up with the insurance company.

The process will conclude after your adjuster has negotiated your settlement amount and you have received your final check of the highest possible amount. Public Adjusters help you by:

**Preventing mistakes with your claim.**

**Protecting you against your insurance company.**

**Improving the overall outcome of your claim.**

Public adjusters also spend a significant amount of time preparing comprehensive scope and cost estimates, use experts in the fields of remediation and construction engineering to demonstrate the loss, they interpret insurance policies to determine covered and uncovered items, and they negotiate with the insurance carrier to ensure a fair settlement for the property owner.

Along with completing their standard job duties, your public adjuster will come as a benefit to you in a variety of ways. Since most property owners are not experienced with property insurance claims, there are a lot of potential mistakes that can happen when going through the process alone. With a public adjuster, you can rest assured that they know exactly what to submit in order to get your insurance company to pay.

By acting as the middle-man between you and your insurer, your adjuster will protect you against any tricks that your insurance company might have up their sleeves. Unfortunately, insurance companies frequently take advantage of property owners who are going through a claim without representation. With the help of a public adjuster advocating for you, there will be no need to worry.

Finally, your public adjuster will improve the overall outcome of your claim. Property owners who file claims on their own might not know exactly how much money they are entitled to, nor how to make sure they receive it at the end of the process. This is not the case with a public adjuster, who will be able to grant you a larger settlement than you could realistically achieve yourself - in the 2010 Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability, it was found that public adjusters can get policyholders settlements over 570% higher than usual.

The public adjuster that you hire must hold all necessary requirements and credentials, including a valid license in your state. You should never hire door-to-door public

## A GOOD PUBLIC ADJUSTER WILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUALITIES

Holds necessary requirements and credentials

Behaves professionally

Exemplary communication



adjusters, and should only consider those with great references and a high success rate.

In addition, your potential adjuster should behave professionally, meaning that you should never feel pressured or as if you are being scammed. Great public adjusters are upfront about their fees, and will not try to overcharge you.

The primary goal of public adjusters is to help those in need of the unique services they can provide. In other words, they have the skills and experience to work on any and all claims. Their expertise allows public adjusters to make a living only by winning claim settlements for property owners.

The average payment structure will be a percentage of the final settlement check, meaning that the claim must be fully won before a public adjuster is paid. As a result, public adjusters work just as hard as property owners would themselves to speed up the process and get the highest settlement possible.

Most public adjusters are property owners too. As your neighbors and friends, they understand the stress and sorrow that comes with losing something within your

property to natural disasters, theft, and any other unforeseen damages. Public adjusters understand that they could all find themselves in the same situation, which is something that no property owner wants to deal with. For this reason, they do their absolute best to fight for other property owners and give the outstanding service that

they would expect for themselves. For all of these reasons, establishing and building a relationship with a public adjuster that you trust is one of the best ways to protect yourself against unforeseen circumstances as a property owner. When your insurance company fails to protect you, you will have a representative there to catch you and retrieve the settlement money that you need to rebuild your life as much as you possibly can. While it will cost the property owner a percentage of their claim settlement, many property owners find that using

a public adjuster makes the process of filing a claim easier and much less stressful. Additionally, a public adjuster like the Bulldog Adjusters' team will also recover more money than could be recovered without our help, so the cost to hire one is practically free.

**Bulldog Adjusters can help You**

# REVIEWS

To the Bulldog family and staff, **A BIG THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP IN THE TIME I NEEDED** I was happy that you were on my side. I'm pleased with the way you helped me. I'm pleased with the way you handle the situation. I would let people know about your company and if needed help in the future I would call you again. Thank you so much to the family of Bulldog. I was treated with respect and courtesy. A big thank you to David Flakes for his help. Have a blessed day,

I am a *United States* veteran that had the worst experience with my *home insurance company*, however bulldog Adjusters stepped in and got the job done with urgency and accuracy. If you're in need of assistance handling a claim use the most professional team that truly cares. **BULLDOG ADJUSTERS I THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART AND MANY CONTINUED BLESSINGS UPON YOUR BUSINESS.** The world needs more firms with the integrity and fortitude you possess.

*This was our first real hurricane.* Hurricane Irma did a job on our whole county. After the hurricane we were stressed beyond belief. A good friend suggested we get an adjuster and gave me Bulldogs' business card. **FROM THE DAY WE CALLED, BULLDOG ADJUSTERS, THEY DID AN AMAZING JOB.** We took pictures, signed a few papers and that was it! Bulldog inspectors were always on property during the insurance company inspections and ensured everything was documented properly. *I will never worry about going through a hurricane again! What a relief to have Bulldog's help.* **I WOULD RECOMMEND BULLDOG ADJUSTERS TO ANYONE THAT HAS GONE THROUGH A NATURAL DISASTER AND HAS PROPERTY/HOME DAMAGE.** Forget fighting your insurance company with Bulldog. They most certainly deserve their name.

*This company got our family awesome results.* I chose them because of their public adjusters' experience. I met with several companies who would sell you pie in the sky. Dan Labow was very knowledgeable and experienced. He explained the process in detail and provided a realistic picture of what would occur, *how and when.* **This is exactly what was needed.** The attorney they referred me to was excellent as well. Most attorneys want an arm and a leg in fees but this firm was more than fair. **THE STAFF WAS EXCELLENT. GREAT ATMOSPHERE AT THEIR OFFICE. I WOULD DEFINITELY RECOMMEND THIS COMPANY.** I know that I couldn't have achieved these results on my own. **THANKS BULLDOG ADJUSTERS!**

# CASE STUDIES

It really doesn't matter what amount of damage was done to your property **Bulldog Adjusters can handle your claim at any size.** Our experts have years of experience in determining the best course of action for handling your claim. Additionally, **once your claim is settled, you will be able to rest assured**, knowing that you have received the best possible settlement available.

**Bulldog Adjusters handles multiple types of claims**, including drain backups, broken drain lines, mold growth, shower leaks, supply line leaks, and kitchen leaks. Our experts can handle the most technical of plumbing insurance claim cases big or small. **Any claim can result in serious negotiation with your insurance carrier.**

**Our process at Bulldog Adjusters is simple.** We begin with a free inspection that allows us to assess the damage. Then, we create a damage estimate using feedback from our experts. Following that, we file your claim. After that, all that's left is for you to receive your settlement from your insurance company. While the process is simple on the surface, it can be incredibly time-consuming. **That's why property owners choose to hire Bulldog Adjusters to handle the hassle of their damage claims.**

**Call Bulldog Adjusters if you have a property damage or property claim.** Our team of experts, with over a decade of experience, will do a free inspection, talk with you about your options, and then file your claim with the insurance carrier.

**The team at Bulldog Adjusters will also negotiate with your insurance company until you get the settlement you deserve for your claim.**



## COMMERCIAL- HURRICANE IRMA

**Background Story:** This apartment complex's owner signed up with Bulldog Adjusters within months after Hurricane Irma passed when their insurance carrier told them that the claim they'd made fell below the deductible, which meant the amount of damage was actually not worth more than the deductible and any damages would have to be paid out of pocket.

**Damages:** This townhouse complex had severe roof damage to many of the buildings, balcony damage which resulted in damage to the paint and stucco, fencing damage surrounding the complex, and intense amount of large and small-scale debris that required removal.

**Settlement:** After a long battle with the insurance carrier, we settled the claim for **\$625,000** after their **\$89,000** deductible.



# CASE STUDIES

## COMMERCIAL- HURRICANE MICHAEL

Background Story: This business owner felt as if the carrier was treating them unfairly from the beginning when their initial inspection took place. As a result of their treatment during that first inspection, the client began looking for assistance and came across Bulldog Adjusters. Once hired, we analyzed and documented the claim very quickly in order to begin engaging back and forth with the carrier.

After getting into it with engineers and adjusters, the insurance company eventually made an initial payment of **\$85,000.00** right at the 90-day mark. However, that amount was not enough to cover the claim and the damages left behind as a result of Hurricane Michael. We stood by what was right for our client, requested another inspection to show them our differences, and ended up with the insurance company settling for an additional **\$150,000.00** on top of what they had been offering.

**Damages:** Exterior damage, damage to roofing shingles, exterior metal gutters, exterior windows, and exterior glass door. Interior damage to the wood in the ceiling, carpet, paint in multiple rooms.

**Settlement:** We settled for **\$150,000.00** after the **\$50,000** deductible and a prior payment of **\$85,163.54**.

## RESIDENTIAL-ROOF CLAIM

Background Story This homeowner opened a claim for their roof as a result of extreme damage from a hailstorm. They started the process on their own, and after 100 days they were given a check for **\$20,061.04** after their **\$6,571** deductible. With all of the damage from the hail, the insured couldn't believe that their insurance would shortchange them like that.

The initial payment was so small that it would not even begin to cover what they needed to repair the damage and get their lives back on track. The homeowner and their family really were severely underpaid. Once Bulldog Adjusters came on board however, we reopened the claim and, after endless inspections and many discussions, we settled for **\$103,367.96** after prior payments and deductible.

**Damages:** Hail damaged the top of roof, the back wall in the yard, the wood fence on the left side of the house, under the roof, and a white gutter. Additionally, we documented hail-related damage along with the garage door and the screen enclosure as well as related water damage to the interior of the home across multiple rooms.

**Settlement:** **\$103,367.96** after a prior payment of **\$20,061.04** and their **\$6,571** deductible.



RESIDENTIAL-DISHWASHER LEAK

RESIDENTIAL-PIPE LEAK

CASE STUDIES

Background Story: In this case, the homeowner hired us from the beginning of the claim after his dishwasher leaked and created chaos, started mold growth, and left large amounts of water damage to a big portion of his home.

After the initial inspection, the homeowner’s insurance company made the initial payment within a reasonable time frame. However, we still pushed for a reinspection and obtained a supplemental on the claim. Even with our hard work, the homeowner would still have still been forced to cover the majority of the damages out of pocket if we’d accepted.

After many unsuccessful settlement offers, we proceeded with an alternative settlement avenue and he obtained a fantastic settlement.

**Damages:** Water damage to the kitchen cabinets, the living room, dining room, and entryway that included widespread mold. Additionally, the flooring, paint, drywall, and baseboards in multiple rooms were subject to similar damage from the leak. Pictures: I can share the Google Drive and you can select with images to include

**Settlement:** We negotiated a final settlement of **\$30,000.00** for the insured after all previous payments (totaling **\$65,006.12**) and their deductible.

Background Story: The homeowner in this case hired Bulldog Adjusters after her insurance company denied the pipe leak claim she had opened.

Typically, we would suggest that the insured hire an attorney following our initial documentation in particular cases. However, after a review of her denial letter, we believed the denial was done incorrectly. We sent out our plumbing expert to take a look and make a detailed report.

Once we submitted all our documentation to the carrier, they made an initial payment. As a result of where the pipe leak was located, we also suspected that mold could have formed in the space. We had our mold experts come in to test for mold and once our suspicions were confirmed, we revised our scope and settled with the carrier.

**Damages:** The walls and floors in the insured’s kitchen, living room, dining room, bathroom, and office were all damaged as a result of the pipe leak.

**Settlement:** The insurance company settled with us for a final payment of **\$40,119.88** following an initial payment of **\$23,880**.



**If your property has  
damage, contact**



**BULLDOG<sup>™</sup>**  
ADJUSTERS

**BULLDOG ADJUSTERS  
CAN HELP YOU WITH  
DAMAGE TO YOUR  
HOME OR BUSINESS  
PROPERTY FROM.**

- Thunderstorms
- Water Damage
- Hurricanes
- Fire
- Hail
- Vandalism
- Tornadoes
- Mold

And so many  
*other types of*  
**claims...**

**OUR TEAM IS  
READY TO HELP  
YOU GET YOUR  
LIFE BACK TO  
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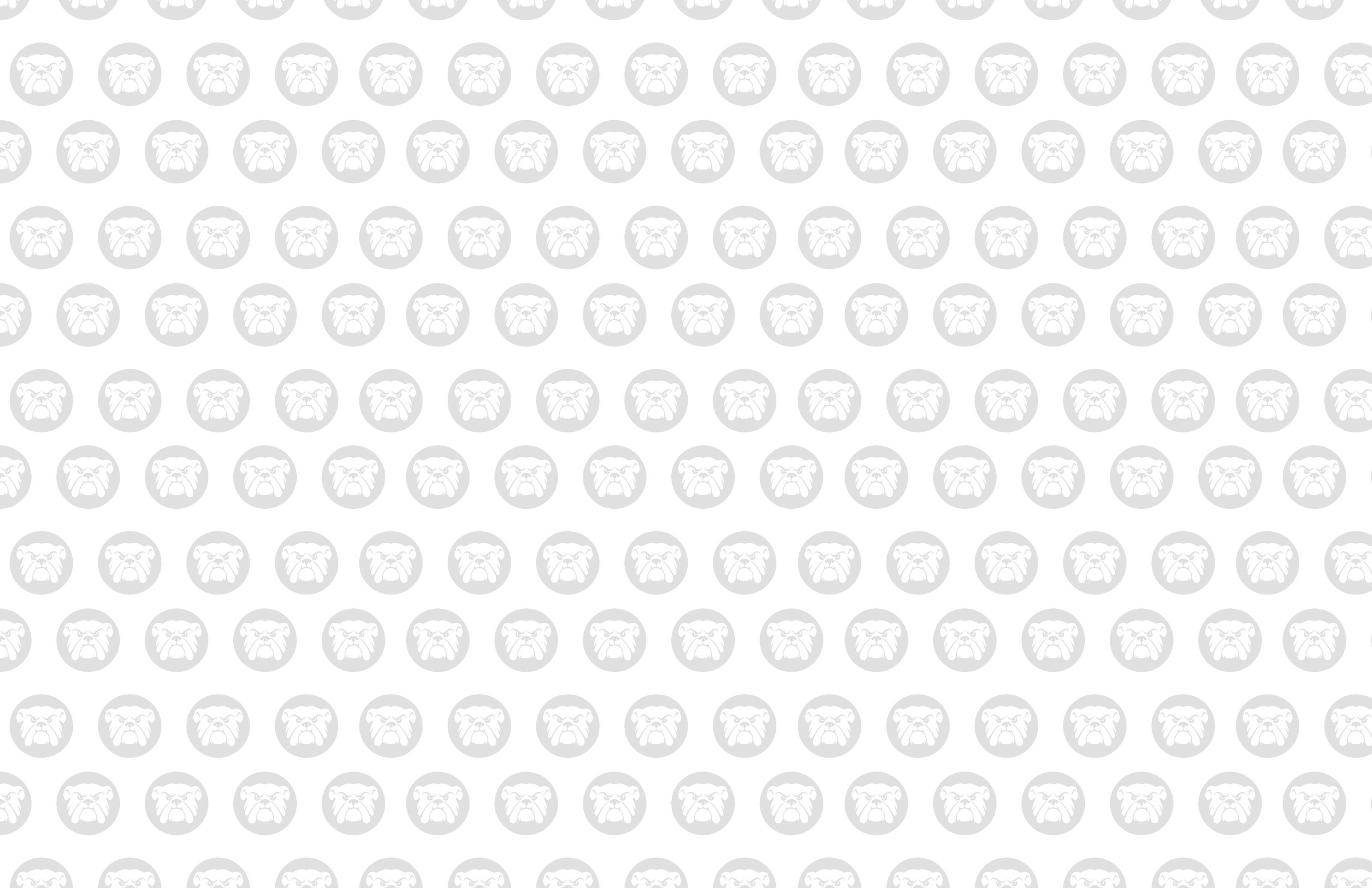


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