



Prepare Now for Storm Season

By John D. Doak, Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner

Storm season in Oklahoma is here, and now is the time to prepare for the worst. It's almost impossible to plan for tornadoes or severe weather since every storm is different and unpredictable, but having a few key tasks completed before a disaster hits will give you peace of mind.

First, make sure you have sufficient homeowners insurance. Standard homeowners insurance policies cover damage caused by tornadoes to the structure of the building and its contents. Your coverage limits should reflect the current cost of rebuilding your home and replacing your personal belongings. You should also check to see if your policy includes replacement cost or actual cash value. Replacement cost is preferred because it pays to replace the lost item with a brand new replacement. Actual cash value only pays what the item is worth now. For example, a laptop purchased for \$2,000 four years ago may now be only worth \$700. Finding another comparable laptop at that price would be extremely difficult.

If you rent your home, renters insurance will cover the loss of personal possessions if your house or apartment is destroyed in a tornado. Most policies will also reimburse you the difference between additional living expenses and normal living costs if you are forced to live somewhere else because of the damage.

Second, check your car insurance coverage. Damage to cars from a tornado is covered under the optional comprehensive portion of a standard auto insurance policy. Oklahoma does not require that drivers have this coverage. Minimum liability coverage will not cover the cost of replacing or repairing your car if it is destroyed or damaged in a storm.

Third, make a home inventory or update your current inventory. A thorough list of your possessions will help speed up the claims process and ensure that you are properly compensated for your loss. Include pictures or video if possible and write down as much detail as you can about each item including when it was purchased and how much it cost. Store both your home inventory and photos at a secure, off-site location like a safe

deposit box or with an online storage service. For help making your home inventory, go to www.ok.gov/oid/HomeInventory.

Fourth, make a family emergency plan. Decide where your family will take shelter if there is a disaster. Determine how family members will contact one another and get back together after an emergency. Also, create an emergency supply kit that includes items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered radio, flashlights and batteries. And don't forget about your pets. Include them in your planning and make sure you have supplies for them as well.

Finally, have copies of your insurance policies and contact information for your agent or insurance company. Keep these where you can access them after a disaster. Calling your insurance company or agent is the first step in filing a claim and getting you on the road to recovery.

Following these guidelines will help you face the unexpected during Oklahoma's storm season. For more information or help with any insurance related questions, please contact the Oklahoma Insurance Department's Consumer Assistance Division at 1-800-522-0071.