
CHAPTER 4

How to File an Auto and a Homeowner's Insurance Claim

In this section you will find tips to help you file both auto and homeowner's insurance claims and ensure that your claims are promptly paid in full. Let's start with learning how to file an auto insurance claim.

FILING AUTO CLAIMS

Auto accidents happen all the time, and they are scary events. When you are in an accident, you are overwhelmed and shaken-up even if you are not physically hurt. Thankfully, you are reading this now and not after an accident. *There is a lot to remember to do and very little time to do it.*

I am going to share with you the information you need to remember to gather at the scene of the accident. I suggest you put this information checklist with your insurance card in your vehicle so you may refer to it if you have a car accident.

I want to share this information with you because I know peace of mind is so important. I want to help *ensure that your claim is paid in full and as quickly as possible*. Sharing the knowledge I have accumulated as an insurance industry professional and insider provides you with great service to you as a customer. It is just as good for my business as it is for you.

My clients have filed hundreds, even thousands of auto insurance claims; and as a result, I know what to do and what not to do to get a claim resolved to the satisfaction of my clients. There are a few steps you should take right now before you have to file a claim. *If you keep these steps handy, having a wreck will not make you panic because you will know what to do as soon as it happens.*

Know What IS Covered

Few people read their auto policy, but you should know what your policy covers and what it does not. *No policy can cover every possible situation, but most good policies cover almost all of them.* Sometimes people decide not to have certain coverage because some types of coverage are too expensive or not worth having if a car is fairly old.

A good agent will do an annual policy review to make sure your coverage is up to date and to discuss

discounts. Find out the situations in which you *do not have coverage* by calling your agent and asking him or her to explain what the policy covers and (most importantly) what it *does not cover*.

Follow the "Conditions" (steps)

Insurance companies have *certain steps you need to follow in the event of an accident*. In the policy these steps are called "Conditions." You should know what these conditions are.

You should also determine *right now, before an accident*, what you would do with your car if it needed repairs. Do you have an auto body shop that does excellent work? If so, that is great! If you do not, ask your agent to recommend a body shop close to where you live. **Most insurance companies have shops they consider "preferred" auto body shops.** These shops have good names from doing good work and insurers trust them. Ask your agent or insurance company if there are any of these body shops near you. *Ask your agent what to do and who to call when you need to report a claim.*

You will need to have paper and a pen to make notes at the scene of the accident. Keep at least two writing instruments and a notebook in the car. Keep these in the glove compartment or the console next to the driver's seat. In addition, if your insurance agent has a form that allows you to provide details of an accident, including a sketch of the scene, keep some of these forms in the car, as well. Remember that most cell

phones have built in cameras. You can use yours to take pictures of damage. Now you are prepared if you have an accident.

What to do After You Have an Accident

At the scene, you need to do the following:

1. Stop the car and get help for any injured drivers or passengers.

Give whatever help you can to the injured (covering them with blankets, making them comfortable), **but do not move them. You could cause more harm by moving anyone who is badly hurt.** Have someone call the police or highway patrol. Tell the police how many are hurt and how seriously. The police can then notify the nearest medical units if they are needed.

2. Protect the accident scene.

Try to prevent further damage to the vehicles involved by setting up flares or getting your car off the road.

3. Give the police officers whatever information they require.

Give your version of what happened, but **do not, under any circumstances, admit you were at fault, either to the police or the other driver(s).** Just give the facts as you see them. Ask the investigating officer how you can get a copy of the police report. You might need the report when you submit your claim to the insurance

company. Stay at the accident scene until the police have left. (If it is a minor accident, the police may not make a report. In fact, they may not even come to the scene if there are no injuries or serious damage to any of the vehicles involved).

4. Write down the names and information of all drivers and passengers.

Write down the names and information of all people involved in the accident; the plate number; make, model, and year of each car involved; and the driver's license number(s) and auto insurance information of the other driver(s). Write down the names and addresses of as many witnesses as possible and the names and badge numbers of the police officers and any emergency personnel.

5. Write down all the details of the accident you can remember.

Write these either on the accident forms from your insurance company or in your notebook.

6. If necessary, have your car towed to a repair shop.

This is why I suggested earlier having a repair shop in mind before you have an accident. This way, you already know where you want the car towed. Keep the shop's phone number and address in your glove box, along with the number of a towing company.

7. Call your insurance agent to report the claim.

If possible, call from the accident scene. Write the

phone number(s) of your insurance agent so you can easily call to report a claim. Keep this number with the numbers of the repair shop and tow truck. To make your life even simpler, *also save these numbers in your cell phone. If your agent is involved, it will speed up the claim process.* You should also tell your agent if you are not satisfied with how your claim is being handled.

8. Ask your agent or insurance representative how to proceed.

Ask what forms or documents you will need to support your claim. *Your insurer may require you to fill out a "proof of loss" form and supply documents like medical and auto repair bills and a copy of the police report. Keep copies of any paperwork related to the accident.*

9. Keep records of any expenses resulting from the accident.

These might include any expenses related to a temporary inability to work or perform basic household functions. *Your policy may allow you to be reimbursed for such things as medical and hospital expenses, lost wages, and some of the costs of hiring a temporary housekeeper.*

10. Tell your agent if you are not satisfied with how the company handles your claim.

Note how they answer your concerns, but do not at this point use the word "lawyer." Once you raise the prospect of seeking legal help, it changes the way your insurance company deals with you. *When you say "lawyer," you are basically threatening to sue your insurer. Do not make this*

threat until you are absolutely convinced that your insurance company will not resolve the claim to your satisfaction. If you hire a lawyer, no one at the insurance company will be able to communicate with you directly. Instead, he or she will have to go through your attorney.

While no accident is a pleasant experience, remember that proper preparation and following certain steps can help resolve the claim process to your satisfaction. ***If your claim has the important documentation and all the key details, there is no reason it will not be paid in full quickly.***

If you have any trouble, please contact your insurance agent. He or she is there to help you and make sure your insurance policy takes care of you, as it should.

FILING HOMEOWNERS OR PROPERTY INSURANCE CLAIMS

We value the comfort and safety of our homes, so it makes sense to buy insurance to protect your property from bad weather, high wind, burglary, fire, and other types of damage. Fortunately, homeowner's insurance claims do not have to be filed as often as auto claims. I would like to help you have a less stressful time when you find that you have to file a homeowners or property claim.

There are steps to take before and during filing an auto claim. There are also certain steps that will make filing a homeowners claim easier for you. You should keep this book handy and use it as a guide. By following some simple steps, you will be more prepared when the unexpected happens.

Filing a homeowners or property claim can be fairly easy to do if you follow the instructions below. It usually involves contacting your agent for advice and reporting to an adjuster to look over the damage. The next step is repairing the damage and replacing materials as needed. Then the insurance company settles the payment to the repair company.

Insurance companies must meet specific standards according to their state regarding how quickly and effectively they handle claims for their customers. If you think your claim is not being processed in a timely manner, you may want to contact your state's insurance claims department.

If you make too many insurance claims, your name and information could be flagged as "high-risk," making it difficult to get coverage. Your policy could be cancelled if you make *a few claims in one year*. Only file claims for necessary damages to your home or property to remain in good standing. Make sure you have an insurance agent with YOUR best interests in mind.

STEPS TO FOLLOW WHEN FILING A HOMEOWNER'S INSURANCE CLAIM

1. Call Your Insurance Agent

Immediately call your insurance agent to discuss your need to file a claim. Your agent will ask you all the necessary questions to begin the process of filing the claim if one is necessary. The sooner you contact your agent, the better.

2. Make Emergency Repairs

If a criminal smashes your window, it must be repaired as soon as possible. Call your insurance agent for a list of repair shops he or she recommends. He or she may send you paperwork that allows you to have work that is done charged immediately to the insurance company. Correct any problems temporarily until the permanent repairs are made. In the case of the broken window, use sturdy cardboard and heavy plastic or fabric to stop air and water from coming into your house. Most insurance companies won't cover the damage that results from your failure to make temporary repairs. Wait until the adjuster comes to begin the permanent repair work. Keep copies of bills from any temporary repairs.

3. Document in Detail

Use a digital camera to photograph and video the damage before you begin cleaning. Make a detailed list of what happened to your property. This will provide proof of all the damage for your insurance claim, therefore, be

careful and take your time. If anyone saw what happened, add his or her name and contact information to the list. Use police or fire department reports if any were filed.

4. Keep Track of Conversations About the Claim

Keep a record of your conversations with your insurance agent, insurance company representatives and the name and contact information of anyone else you talk to about the claim. Save emails about the claim, too.

5. Be Home When Your Insurance Adjuster Comes

Be at home when your insurance adjuster comes to record the damage to your property. If the adjuster does not see something, you can then point it out to him or her.

6. Know Your Policy

Read your policy in full. Your policy is a formal agreement with your insurance company. It is a binding contract, and you must know what it says. Know what your policy covers and what it does not, and know how much your deductible is. Ask your insurance agent questions about it BEFORE you ever have to make a claim. The easiest way to do this is an annual review with your insurance agent. If your current agent doesn't offer this valuable service, find another FAST.

7. Avoid Hiring a Lawyer

If you mention hiring a lawyer, your insurance company might actually slow down the processing of your

claim. When a lawyer is involved, only the lawyer will be able to communicate with the insurance company, the adjuster, and your agent. This slows down the settlement process. If you need help settling your claim, call your insurance agent first. If you still feel your adjuster is being unfair and your agent does not offer to help the communication process, then you may want to discuss this with the state insurance department or as a last resort, hire an attorney.

8. Keep a Copy of the Police or Fire Report

If your claim involves theft, file a police report and keep a copy of it. Your insurance adjuster will also need a copy.

9. Inventory Your Possessions

Make a detailed list, or inventory, of every single item you own. If you do not have one, make a list of everything that was destroyed, damaged, or stolen. Prepare your inventory and update it when you purchase or sell items. Being prepared will give you peace of mind if you have to file a claim. Keep receipts from your purchases, especially for your most expensive items. It helps you and your insurance agent by providing written proof of the cost of your items. Using a digital camera to take photos and videos to add to your written inventory (taken before and after the damage) also helps to process your claim. Don't wait until you have to file a claim to make your inventory. It's much harder to remember all the items you had when they are gone.

