

Here to help - steps to disaster recovery

As different areas of the country either brace for severe storm impact or begin recovery efforts in the wake of devastation, many homeowners in affected areas find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings with difficult choices to make. At loanDepot, we stand with homeowners grappling with new and emerging realities regarding their next steps forward. If you're in either the path or wake of a natural disaster, know that you're not alone. Consider this a guide when weather wreaks serious havoc.

BEFORE THE STORM

If you believe your residence is unsafe or at risk, you should leave and seek shelter immediately

The Red Cross can help you find shelter. In addition, local organizations will have established shelters and may be able to provide meals, clothing and personal goods.

If there's time, and you can do so safely, photographing each wall in your residence before you depart can be immeasurably helpful to the rebuilding and insurance recovery purposes. If time permits, secure the property to the degree that you can: board over windows, secure outdoor furnishings, and trim back tree branches that could become detached or airborne in high winds.

DURING STORM ACTIVITY

Once you've reached safety, reach out to your mortgage servicer and insurance provider to begin the process of recording, repair, and recovery. Make sure you access the latest information regarding natural disaster status from the **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)** at [fema.gov/disasters](https://www.fema.gov/disasters). Apply for **necessary financial aid at [disasterassistance.gov](https://www.disasterassistance.gov)**, and make initial calls to get in touch with your servicer and insurer.

Connect with your mortgage servicer

Most lenders offer disaster-related payment forbearance, which can be helpful as you sort through disaster impacts. Forbearance allows for the temporary suspension of your monthly mortgage payments while your current loan remains in effect. You may qualify for forbearance if your property is in a county designated as a FEMA Individual Assistance County on the FEMA website. If you qualify for forbearance, you'll work with your servicer to create a repayment plan.

Be aware that there are options to explore even if you've suffered a natural disaster-related financial hardship and reside outside a FEMA-declared disaster zone. If you do reside in a FEMA-declared disaster area and your property or finances have suffered, you'll likely automatically qualify for a forbearance of at least three months, and any credit reporting and late charges will be suppressed.

If you don't have your lender's contact information, your monthly mortgage statement, or coupon book with you, you can search the **Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems (MERS)** at [mers-servicerid.org/sis/](https://www.mers-servicerid.org/sis/) or call **toll-free at (888) 679-6377** to find the company that services your mortgage.

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Make initial contact with your insurance provider

Reach out to your homeowners' insurance agent and your flood insurance agent. Confirm what your coverage includes and whether any specific steps need to be completed before repairs can begin. Many hazard policies also cover alternate living expenses while you're out of your home that includes temporary housing and meal assistance.

Request disaster assistance

If you're a homeowner or renter in a county that's been designated as part of a federally-declared disaster area, you can register for federal disaster assistance even if you have insurance.

Policies vary in terms of coverage, and everyone's coverage can differ, however you may register with FEMA for grants or temporary rental assistance, critical home repairs and other disaster-related needs that may not be covered by pre-existing insurance.

It's recommended that you not wait for an insurance settlement to apply for federal assistance. Waiting may cause you to miss a FEMA-imposed deadline to apply for aid and lose access to designated federal disaster assistance.

If you don't have specific coverage related to flooding, assistance may be available to you. You may be able to receive rental payments for temporary housing, unemployment compensation, loans to cover residential losses not covered by insurance, and grants for home repairs and replacement of personal property and other disaster-related needs.

To apply for assistance, visit disasterassistance.gov or call the registration phone number at (800) 621-3362. Those with hearing loss or a speech disability can call (800) 462-7585, and those who use 711 or Video Relay Service can call (800) 621-3362.

The U.S. Small Business Administration provides support through three specific types of disaster assistance:

- 1** Home Disaster Loans for families requiring funds to repair or rebuild their real estate or personal property. Available to owners and renters, this covers property including vehicles so residents can return to work.
- 2** Business Disaster Loans for businesses requiring repairs or property replacement due to effects of the disaster. This can include impacted real estate, stock inventory, and supplies and equipment. There is no company size eligibility requirement to qualify.
- 3** Economic Injury Disaster Loans provide working capital to businesses requiring financial support to meet their obligations during a period of crisis recovery. This type of support is only available to businesses that cannot access outside credit to meet their cash flow needs.

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AFTER STORM ACTIVITY

Once the storm has subsided, thoughts and efforts move into a new stage as recovery work can begin.

Document incurred damage; secure your property

Once you can confirm that there's been damage to your property, contact your insurance provider directly to file a claim. Insurers need documentation of the damages caused by the severe weather. When safe to do so after the weather event subsides, return to the property to take pictures of the current condition of your belongings. These are especially powerful when paired with any images you may have been able to capture prior to your departure, and can be helpful if items need to be disposed of due to emerging public health concerns. Keep these photos in a safe location (preferably soft copies secured in the cloud). If it's safe to do so, board up broken windows and cover damaged roofs to protect the property from additional damage. Additionally, keep receipts for post-storm purchases that include accommodations and meals. Your insurer will provide direction about when and how to begin the repair process.

If you are not insured, the first thing to do is to **contact FEMA at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or call them at 800-621-FEMA (3362)** to file a claim. Once the paperwork is completed, an inspector will come out to inspect the damage. FEMA also sets up Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs) where those impacted can learn about FEMA and other assistance programs. Please note that if you are eligible for an Individual Disaster Assistance grant you are not required to pay back the grant to FEMA.

Contact your utility companies

If your home is damaged and you aren't able to live in it, contact your utility companies to suspend your services.

Beware of post-disaster scammers

Stay vigilant against phony housing inspectors or building contractors, bogus requests for disaster donation, and false offers of state or federal aid. Remember that officials never request money to offer help, and always carry identification badges. There is no fee to apply for or to receive help from FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, or the state agency.

Suspicious of potential scam or defrauding activity? Report concerns to the **FEMA Disaster Fraud Hotline – (866) 720-5721, (844) 889-4357** or by contacting state law enforcement, or the state attorney general's consumer protection hotline.

The road to recovery in the wake of a natural disaster can be a long one. But know that you're not alone, and that there's assistance available that can help you rebuild the losses you've sustained. Working closely with you, insurance providers and federal support agencies can help you put back together what Mother Nature has disturbed.