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If Idalia Doesn't Have Home Insurance on Your Radar, It Should

Here are five things property owners should know about hurricane coverage

Published 08/29/23 05:21 PM ET | Updated 08/29/23 07:31 PM ET

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As Idalia’s threatening trajectory kicks the Atlantic hurricane season into high gear, homeowners in and out of its path need to be thinking about how protected they are if disaster strikes.

If you own a home for the first time, the basics of homeowners insurance can be even more vexing — especially now, when premiums are rising and some insurers are [pulling away from disaster-prone markets](#). To boil it down, here are a few things every homeowner should know about their coverage.

No. 1: Storm Surge Isn’t Covered by Standard Policies

A standard homeowners policy — the kind required if you have a mortgage — covers repairing or rebuilding your home if it is damaged or destroyed by various types of disasters, but there are many restrictions. In the case of a hurricane, the policy covers damage from winds, but not from flooding or so-called [storm surge](#). For those types of damage, you have to purchase separate insurance.

Storm surge is when a [storm’s winds push water onshore and raise the sea water level](#). For coastal areas, it’s often the most threatening aspect of a hurricane, and the storm surge expected from Idalia could get as high as 15 feet above ground level along portions of Florida’s Gulf Coast, according to the National Hurricane Center.

Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, is a prime example of the devastation that can be caused by storm surge. At \$193.8 billion in today’s dollars, it’s the [costliest storm in U.S. history](#).

No. 2: You Have to Buy Flood Insurance Separately and It Can Take 30 Days to Kick In

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Flood insurance covers storm surge and other types of flooding, but homeowners have to buy that type of policy separately. If you're thinking about buying a policy because of an imminent threat, make sure there isn't a waiting period before it takes effect. Most flood policies have one.

Homeowners can buy flood insurance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's [National Flood Insurance Program](#) either directly or through dozens of private insurers. In recent years, some private insurers have started selling their own policies too, which can potentially offer more flexibility on things like coverage limits and waiting periods. NFIP policies don't kick in for 30 days, with some exceptions, while private flood policies may offer a 10-day window or even [no waiting period at all](#).

Depending on whether you live in a high-risk flood area, homeowners with a mortgage may be required to have flood insurance, but [FEMA recommends](#) everyone at least consider it, since all properties are vulnerable to some extent.

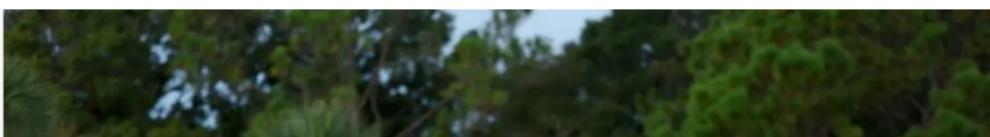
The Insurance Information Institute estimates 90% of natural disasters — especially hurricanes — include some form of flooding, but said a recent survey of homeowners showed [64% don't think they are at risk of flooding](#).

No. 3: You May Have a Separate (Higher) Hurricane Deductible

If you live in a coastal state between Maine and Texas, you have a [separate deductible](#) for hurricanes and/or windstorms in your regular homeowner policy, according to the institute.

Unlike the standard dollar amount, a hurricane or windstorm deductible is typically 1% to 5% of the insured value of your home structure, meaning you have to pay that amount before the insurance kicks in for covered damages.

A hurricane deductible may be higher than other deductibles in your policy and will be triggered by specific characteristics of the hurricane. Some insurers may offer you a way to lower your hurricane deductible for a higher premium.





Brian Schmidt and Alyssa Wheeler fill sandbags at a community park in Pinellas Park, Florida, on Tuesday in preparation for Hurricane Idalia. Joe Raedle/Getty Images

No. 4: Your Coverage Limits May Not Have Caught Up With Inflation

Don't count on your insurer to automatically adjust your policy limits to reflect current repair and replacement costs. Thanks to soaring inflation, higher-priced labor and materials have driven home replacement costs up more than 55% since 2019, according to the institute, so you should ask an independent insurance agent if you have enough coverage.

State Farm, for instance, says that even though it automatically adjusts coverage limits each year, certain conditions raise costs [beyond normal inflation](#).

No. 5: Coverage for Spoiled Food May Not Help You

If you lose power and the food in your fridge and freezer spoils, your standard homeowner policy may cover it. But take note: The standard deductible may apply to food, so unless you eat a lot of steak or caviar, chances are you won't actually see any money from your insurer.

For instance, [if your deductible is \\$500](#) and you haven't had any claims for the year, the contents of your fridge would have to cost more than that (and only that difference would be covered.)

Helpful Resources

- The [declarations page](#) of your homeowner policy is a good place to start if you want to make sure you've got the right coverage.
- Every state has its own [insurance department](#) with many guides and resources for consumers.
- The [Insurance Information Institute](#), which has more than 50 major insurance company members, calls itself the No. 1 online insurance resource. It doesn't lobby for its members or sell policies.
- Some major insurers have started retreating from Florida and California because they are so prone to disasters, but fallback options include Citizen Property Insurance Corp. in Florida and the FAIR Plan in California. [Citizens](#) is a government entity and [FAIR](#) is a syndicated insurance pool that bills itself as "insurance of last resort."

Read next [Idalia Now Forecasted to Make Landfall as 'Extremely Dangerous' Category 4 Hurricane](#)
