



What home insurance may not cover

Most people think about their homeowners insurance only rarely except when they have a claim. By the time something goes wrong, however, it's way too late to begin learning about your coverages.

Many so-called "exclusions" vary by the insurer. If you know about them in advance, you may be able to switch carriers or buy extra insurance to stay protected. So pull out your policy and check for the following:

Mold and water damage

A year ago, if a pipe burst in your home, your insurer would probably pay for the damage, including mold remediation. Now you may not be covered for the mold. A huge increase in mold-related claims in California has many insurers scrambling to eliminate or at least reduce their exposure. Many insurers are limiting how much they'll cover for water damage, as well.

War, nuclear accidents and terrorism

If your home is burned down in a riot or other "civil commotion," your insurer probably will pay to rebuild it. If your home is damaged by an invading army or is irradiated by a nearby power plant, however, you're not covered. If your house is destroyed during a terrorist attack, you also may be on your own. California is approving the exclusions on a company-by-company basis.

Natural disasters

If your home burns down in a wildfire, you're probably covered if you live in a developed area. If you live in a remote cabin or your home is inundated by a flood or blown away in a tornado you may not be. California residents can get earthquake coverage from the state-run California Earthquake Authority or from a handful of insurers willing to write earthquake policies. Floods, meanwhile, aren't covered under homeowners insurance policies. The National Flood Insurance Program, run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, offers coverage. If you're the victim of a landslide, however, you're pretty much on your own.

Neglect

If a tree topples over in a windstorm and crushes your house, you're covered. If your home collapses because of a termite infestation, you're probably not. Insurers expect you to take care of your home and deal with any maintenance issues on your own dime. Insurance generally covers "sudden and unexpected" losses — not losses from termites, rodent infestations or a water leak you never quite got around to fixing.

Dogs

If you own a toothless Chihuahua, your insurer probably doesn't care. Buy a pit bull, Rottweiler or wolf hybrid, however, and you may find your insurance gets more expensive — if you can persuade your insurer to cover you at all. Each insurer has different policies, though, so you may be able to find affordable coverage if you shop around. You also can ask the insurer to exclude your dog, meaning that you'll pay for any damage it does.

Intentional damage

If your ex sets fire to your home, you're probably covered. If the fire is started by your rebellious teenager or an estranged spouse, however, you may not be. Intentional damage by an insured person — or by the person's spouse, children or relatives living in the house — typically isn't covered.

Computer equipment

If you have a personal computer or two, your homeowners insurance may pay you enough to buy a new one — or it may not. If you're running a home business, however, your homeowners insurance almost certainly will fall short.

Luxury items and collectibles

If you don't own anything special, the entire contents of your home are probably covered under your homeowners policy. If you have antiques, guns, jewelry, collectibles or fine furs, you may need extra coverage.