

# What Is A Public Adjuster And Should You Hire One?

By Les Masterson, Forbes Advisor, April 11, 2023



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When you file a homeowners insurance claim, your insurer will send out an adjuster to evaluate damage and determine a claim payout. Under the best circumstances, your payout will be based on the cost to repair or replace a damaged structure or property.

But what if you feel it's not a fair payout? Or what if you're not sure what's covered under your policy or whether the insurance company adjuster was thorough enough?

A public adjuster can help you with the claims process and ensure that your payout is fair and an accurate reflection of the damage and your coverage.

## What Is a Public Adjuster?

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A public insurance adjuster is an independent trained insurance professional that helps individuals with the [homeowners insurance](#) claim process.

Unlike an insurance company adjuster, a public adjuster advocates exclusively for policyholders, says Tim Cornett, president of the Florida Association of Public Insurance Adjusters. They are licensed and trained insurance professionals.

“The financial interests of insurance companies are best served by convincing policyholders to accept the lowest compensation possible,” he says. “The financial interests of public adjusters are directly tied to the interests of policyholders to receive full and fair compensation on insurance claims.”

Cornett says public adjusters are often more thorough in their damage analysis than company adjusters. That's because of their training and also because their loyalties are to you, the policyholder, and not the insurance company.

## What Does a Public Adjuster Do?

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As an independent insurance professional, a public adjuster works for the policyholder to ensure their claim is settled in a fair and efficient manner. Their role can include:

- Evaluating damages and estimating the cost of and time it will take to repair or replace property or structures.

- Helping you understand your insurance policy, tracking the claim, filing documents and meeting deadlines.
- Acting as a liaison between you, the insurer, and any other third-parties such as attorneys or witnesses.
- Negotiating with your insurance company to achieve a fair payout

## When Should You Hire a Public Adjuster?

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There's no specific rule regarding when you should hire a public adjuster, but there are some circumstances that make it worth considering:

- You're filing a large claim for high-value, significant or complex damage to your home, like a fire.
- You aren't confident with the assessment performed by your insurer's adjuster.
- You feel your insurer's adjuster underestimated your claim or that your payout isn't fair.
- You need assistance with a complex claim or the claims process.

## How Much Does a Public Adjuster Cost?

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Most public adjusters charge a percentage of the total claim payout. Their compensation can be as low as 3% or as high as 30% of your insurance settlement, depending on the size of your claim.

For instance, if your final claim payment is \$250,000 and your adjuster charges 10%, then you'd pay approximately \$25,000.

Other common fee structures include a flat rate or hourly rate.

The cost of a public adjuster varies based on the nature of your claim, where you live, the adjuster you choose and their fee structure.

If you're considering hiring a public adjuster, it's a good idea to get multiple [homeowners insurance quotes](#) or estimates to find out how much you may pay based on the claim type and your location.

## Where to Find A Public Adjuster

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There are several ways to find a reliable public insurance adjuster.

### **A recommendation**

A word-of-mouth recommendation is one of the best ways to find a reliable adjuster. If someone has done a good job for a friend or family member, chances are they'll work hard for you. Good insurance adjusters often rely on word-of-mouth recommendations for new business—so if you know of a good public adjuster, tell a friend.

### **A regional association**

A state organization such as the [California Association of Public Insurance Adjusters](#), the [Florida Association of Public Insurance Adjusters](#), the [New York Public Adjusters Association](#) or the [Texas Association of Public Insurance Adjusters](#) can guide you to one of its members. These associations often have strict membership requirements, and their adjusters must adhere to a code of ethics.

### **The National Association of Public Insurance Adjusters**

The national organization for insurance adjusters [has a directory on its site](#) where you can find the closest member. Here, too, members must meet requirements and abide by a code of conduct.

## **What Happens During a Big Homeowners Insurance Claim**

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A large claim can get confusing really fast. Say a hurricane hits your home and you're living out of a hotel. Your insurance company could assign three different adjusters to work on your claim: one for damage to the dwelling, one for your personal property and one for additional living expenses.

Unfortunately, preparing and presenting a successful claim is a science. It requires a meticulous approach to ensure a fair settlement. An adjuster can explain the process during a confusing and stressful time and work on your behalf handling the meetings, e-mails, phone calls and paper documents that flow for a large claim.

“You’re at a disadvantage when you have major house damage or a total loss of your home,” explains James Guercio, owner of Rubin & Rosen Adjusters in New York. “You face a home insurance claims process that could easily stretch out for some time, require detailed paperwork and leave you mentally and physically exhausted.”

Making matters worse, most families know little or nothing about insurance, let alone the claims process. So on a large claim, they’re in unfamiliar territory and dealing with multiple insurance adjusters.

“Hiring a public claims adjuster will put you on an even playing field with your insurance company,” says Guercio.

Not every claim requires a public adjuster. Many claims are routine, and a company adjuster is more than capable of doing the job effectively.

“In most cases, a public adjuster is not needed,” says Jeff Zander, the CEO of Zander Insurance. “But an adjuster can be helpful or be worth their cost in the event of a very large claim or total loss of a home.”

And remember, you can always request another company adjuster if you don’t like the one assigned to you.

## **What Should You Expect From Hiring a Public Adjuster?**

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For any homeowners insurance claim, a public adjuster may be able to point out claims money you’re entitled to that you didn’t even know about. After all, a homeowner can’t be expected to be an insurance expert. A public adjuster

will also keep working when you're exhausted by the whole process. By maximizing your claim, they can pay for themselves.

On a smaller claim, a public adjuster may be able to find language in your insurance contract that can result in thousands of dollars extra for your claim.

## **Public Adjusters vs Independent Adjusters**

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Public adjusters work for and are paid by you, the policyholder. Their job is to ensure your claim payout accurately reflects the cost of repairs or replacements. They can also help you understand your coverage, manage a complex claim and keep your claim on track.

Contrary to what the name suggests, independent adjusters are hired by the insurance company to evaluate claims. They work on behalf of and are paid by the insurer.