

Effective claims response to severe weather events must begin long before the skies darken



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Over just the past two years, devastating disasters have occurred with what appears to be increasing frequency and severity, from extremely

powerful hurricanes and widespread flooding to historic wildfires in the U.S. and Canada. At times like these, the claims services provided by the insurance industry are of particular importance to businesses and individuals. But while support provided after a disaster is the moment of truth for any insurance relationship, the enduring value of a company's claims services is about more than just writing a check. It's about building and nurturing relationships that encourage long-term trust, collaboration and resilience planning.

At Zurich, Claims is a central component of customer relationships from the beginning. Our claims professionals routinely collaborate with underwriters, risk engineers and actuarial teams in the acquisition and onboarding of customers, bringing to bear a broad portfolio of knowledge resources and staying engaged as the customer relationship matures and evolves over time. While this approach is relevant in the management of any claim, the full value of a strong, ongoing connection between our claims professionals and our customers and brokers comes into play most significantly when a severe weather event is imminent.

Throughout the year in preparation of hurricane season and anticipation of other catastrophic weather and natural disaster-related events, Zurich's Catastrophe (CAT) Operations team uses a variety of tools – including satellite imagery – to assess the exposures of any customers who may be in the path of a potential storm. We proactively coordinate the service arrangements and readiness of damage-mitigation vendors, like structural engineers, accountants and other consultants who will be central to the timely investigation and resolution of claims after an event.

Alongside the advance work done by our CAT Operations team, Zurich risk engineers work proactively with customers to identify potential vulnerabilities to storm damage and business interruption losses. And our claims teams consult with customers well in advance to determine the resources and assistance they are most likely to need following a severe weather event.

As a named storm approaches, our CAT Operations team begins aligning materials and supplies to help ensure that customers can get back up and running as quickly as possible after the danger has passed. We also reach out to customers and brokers in the path of oncoming storms to notify them that it is time to activate loss mitigation and resilience plans and to advise what support they need from us.

Zurich routinely provides a dedicated 24/7 claims hotline and other channels of communications such as internet, email and text messaging to help customers report claims. Recently, social media also played an innovative role in how Zurich anticipates and responds to the needs of customers before, during and after a major severe weather event. In the crucial hours after Hurricane Michael tore across the Florida Panhandle, a team of Zurich Claims professionals scoured the internet for images of the damage left by the storm. By crowdsourcing readily available social media images from the hardest hit areas, Zurich was able to get a head start responding to customer needs. In effect, even before claims were reported, our team members had early insights into which customers were likely to need help recovering from the storm.

After the danger of a catastrophic event has passed and our teams are allowed into the affected area, we immediately mobilize to help customers on the ground and oftentimes in the air using drones to quickly identify damage to facilities not immediately visible from the ground. The objective of our early activity is to help our customers get back on their feet and in business as quickly as possible, maintaining their own customer relationships and contributing to their organizational resilience.

In addition to deploying physical tools and professional resources as rapidly as possible, Zurich applies innovative technologies to more quickly assess and respond to customer needs. Using the science of predictive analytics, we are able to help customers affected by severe weather assess business interruption potential and strategies to mitigate it. We employ a variety of decision-analysis tools to help support the strategic resolution of claims. And we utilize cognitive computing and software robotics tools to analyze large volumes of data and to recognize anomalies that may impact claims settlements.

Zurich believes that claims services are at the core of every customer relationship from the beginning, whether or not the customer ever experiences a serious or potentially catastrophic event. Indeed, the ongoing, dedicated engagement of claims professionals can be one of the key factors helping customers to prevent claims from occurring and greatly mitigate those that do occur, once again supporting the ultimate goal of effective business resilience.

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