



Maximize Your Home Insurance Payout With a Public Adjuster: Interview With Gwynne Beatty

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Gwynne Beatty

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When you file a claim and get paid that undisputed amount that I mentioned to you earlier, and you don't have a public adjuster, they're going to say, "Okay, the claim is closed." The claim is not closed. That's just language that they use to make you think you're not getting any more money. They're trying to trick you.

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Kendra Seymour

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to *Your Indoor Air* podcast brought to you by Change the Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour, and today's episode is all about navigating homeowners insurance with the help of a public adjuster. Because let's be honest, if you've ever read your insurance policy, it kind of feels like it's meant to overwhelm and confuse you on purpose. And if you've ever filed a claim—maybe a pipe burst, maybe you have roof damage after a storm, maybe you've even been impacted by one of the recent hurricanes—it can feel like the insurance company is not really on your side. But it's not all hopeless. There are actually things you can do and people you can get to help you so that you can maximize the payout from your insurance company. And that's where a public adjuster can be your new best friend. Now, if you don't know what a public adjuster is, we're going to talk about that, and why you want to know this person before you need them. To help us navigate this topic, I want to introduce to you Gwen Beattie. Thanks so much for being here. I know this is a crazy time for you with the recent hurricanes, and you're incredibly busy. So, I really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule to chat with us today.

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Gwynne Beatty

1:26

Thank you. It's important that everybody knows how this works, because it's a very emotional period. And if you can understand the process, the unknown creates the anxiety. The known, you can exhale. So, there's a lot to talk about today.

KS

Kendra Seymour

1:44

Absolutely. So, I do want to give you everyone listening a little bit of a background about Gwen. Now, she is a property damage expert in both the restoration insurance claims. She specializes in addressing and restoring the needs of properties that have been damaged by

hurricanes, fire, mold, and leaks. Now, previous to this, she worked in Haiti for 11 years in the corporate social responsibility for a cell phone company, and her work in Haiti caught the attention of the US Embassy. And the US cell phone company won a global award from the State Department called the Award for Corporate Excellence. And prior to that, she worked in New York City as a public...publicist for digital entertainment clients. And her roster included Digital Media Division of Microsoft, where she created media opportunities for the convergence of celebrities and entertainment and technology. She also grew up on a horse farm and is an animal activist. She belongs to a rotary club where she has developed projects such as free transportation for the homeless to needed resources, a basketball program in Haiti, and an animal rescue that uses animals in group trauma therapy for substance abuse and mental health clients. You are all about helping the people. I love this so much. But we have only, you know, a little bit of time, and we have so much to cover. So, let's just orient people who might be listening. What is a public adjuster, and does that differ from an insurance adjuster that, you know, might get sent out to your home? So, kind of, kind of give us the, you know, 101 on that.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

3:11

There's three titles for adjuster. The insurance adjuster works for the insurance company, not you. The independent adjuster is the freelancer hired by the insurance company...does not work for you. The public adjuster has a different license, and the public adjuster works for the public. So, the public adjuster represents you in your claim and works to get you paid fully and fairly. The insurance company starts out with...if you don't have a public adjuster, you get a check. That's called the undisputed amount. They are not disputing that the damages happen the way you said they did, and they give you, I call it the pittance. So, they'll give you a check like this, but you're due this much. But you don't know what a public adjuster is. You've never heard of one. But if you're in a hurricane area, if you have flooding, a public adjuster, we also handle...a public adjuster can handle a flood claim. There's all sorts of damages. Any type of damages that you can file a claim for, the public adjuster comes in and writes the correct amount of damages up and negotiates with the insurance company. So, you might get five checks, eight checks before your claim settles. Your first check is not your last. And the time frame that you can hire a public adjuster depends on your state, but I know in Florida, it's a full year. In New York, it's two years. New Jersey, it's over a year. So, you have to check state by state. But all is not lost.

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Kendra Seymour

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I love that you bring this up, because I did not know what a public adjuster was for the longest time. And it kind of feels like this is someone your insurance company maybe doesn't want you to know about. But that's why we're having these conversations, is because this is someone that you can hire that really is kind of your quarterback. They have, you know, your best interest, you know, at heart. And so, that's so important when we talk about the kind of damage that comes from water damage, or mold, or hurricanes, or even fires, because it gets really expensive, really fast. And, so, what kinds of situations would, you know, maybe require someone to want to call a public adjuster? Is it every time, you know...

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Gwynne Beatty

5:35

It is.

KS

Kendra Seymour

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...you have a leak under your sink? Or is it only with big claims? So, kind of tell us about that.

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Gwynne Beatty

5:38

No, it's every time. Because you don't know whether it's covered or not—all the policies are the same, but different—and you don't know the extent of the damages. You can file one of the nature claims all day long (the hurricanes, the lightnings, the hails, the sleet, the snow, the fire, the smoke); that doesn't affect your claims history. But the water damage ones, which is the leaks, the AC leaks, hot water heater, fridge line, dishwasher, washing machine leaks...do you have a water cap in your policy? Do you have the...\$10,000 is the most you can get? What's the value of the damages above your deductible? Do you have a deductible of \$2,500 and \$4,000 worth of damages? Those claims count differently in your claims history. You can always contact the public adjuster to come out and do a free inspection before you call in the claim to see what kind of damages they are, what the value is, what your policy says about it. Do you have a water exclusion? You don't want to have a call in about something that's not covered in your policy, because that goes in your claims history. Even inquiries go in your claims history. They know what they're doing, and so does a public adjuster. So, protect yourself. A public adjuster is your secret weapon.

KS

Kendra Seymour

7:12

I love that. Now, you kind of, you kind of alluded to it, but there are different terms for water damage, right? I think there's three of them, like, in this space?

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Gwynne Beatty

7:21

Yes.

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Kendra Seymour

7:21

Can you tell us what those are and how they're kind of categorized differently?

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yes. So, the insurance companies, over the years, have worked on trying to figure out the best way not to pay you. They're interested in paying their shareholders. They're a business. So, that's why you get that first undisputed check, and it's a tiny amount. But...I mean, just for an example, I had a client that got paid \$19,000; we got them \$375,000. It depends on your damages. So, let's talk about the three types of damage when water gets

inside. Clear definitions about what's what, so you use the right language when you call it in (or when you have the public adjuster call it in) so it's packaged and presented correctly with the right language. So, heavy rains, flooding, rising waters...that alone is called "flood." So, that's a separate policy. Do you have a flood policy? Yes, no. If you have a leak inside, which, of those things I mentioned earlier—by the way, the pipes themselves are not covered. Don't call in and say, "I have a pipe leak," because they're going to say, "Sorry, pipes aren't covered. Goodbye." And they're not going to ask you, "Well, what kind of damage did that leak cause?" And you're going to get off the phone saying, "What just happened? I thought I had coverage here."

So that's why you want to call a public adjuster first. Fridge line leak, dishwasher, washing machine, AC, hot water heater leak, any kind of pipes inside. That's called "water damage." And the third one is from storm. So, we're talking about rain from above. That's called "wind-driven rain from a storm-created opening." And you don't know how to say that. That's a wind claim, a hurricane claim. We also categorize...when we file a hail claim, we call it "wind." We don't call it "hail." They are not cooperative, and they're looking for any way not to pay you. So, it's all cap...those are the three things that are the terms for when water gets inside. With a wind-driven rain claim, if you have roof damage and it gets inside, maybe it goes behind your walls. You know, that's one aspect of damage. It might break the seals around your windows, or it might get in, even, under your door. If it gets in under your door, if it came from above, it's wind-driven rain. If it's rising waters, it's flood. So, it's important to know that they have distinctions about this.

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Kendra Seymour

9:56

Okay, so that's super helpful. Because I know sometimes people call in, and they end up making the situation worse because they're saying the wrong things. So, these are really important things for listeners to understand. So, let's dig into some of this a little bit more. With any of the examples you gave, whether it's, you know, a flood or more like a leak, do we file that claim right away? Or do we call a public adjuster first? Is there a statute of limitations on claims? Kind of talk us through the timeline a little bit here.

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yes, yes, and yes. So, it's always a good idea to bring in a public adjuster for a free inspection before you file the claim, before you call the insurance company. You want to see what you're dealing with. Question one is: what is the cause of loss? So...and then, is that a covered peril? So, your policy has a list of perils that is covered, and there's three different insurance forms (different one for rental properties, different for commercial, different for residential). So, is that cause of loss a covered peril in your policy? And then, what is the value? So strategically, do you want to file a claim? If you have a water damage claim, maybe...one thing I didn't mention earlier was overflow. Backup and overflow. I've seen \$5,000 limits for backup and overflow in policies with a \$2,500 deductible. You would never file a claim for that. But guess what? When the toilet overflows on the second floor and you're not home (because maybe it's your second home), and it goes everywhere, and the house has to end up being gutted, you have no walls, you have no floors...and you have no coverage. So, I always recommend to people to ask their agent in email.

Don't...you know, you need this in writing and you need the answer in writing. Because things can be forgotten; things can be misunderstood. You want the answer...don't take the call from the agent. You want to see it in writing. Do I have any water caps in my policy, and what are they? And you wouldn't know by looking at it, the language is very...it disguises, you know, what it really covers. Agents don't work in claims. You can always ask a public adjuster. You can send your policy to a public adjuster. Call them first and ask them, "Hey, can you look at my policy and tell me what kind of coverage I have?" That's your best bet, and they'll do that for free. That's what we do. So, you can...those are two routes to go about. So, you want to find out what the cause of loss is, what the value of the damages are. Is it a covered peril? Should you strategically file a claim or not? And the answer as to how long do you have? You should file a claim (if it's something you want to file) as soon as you get those things sorted out. You should not wait, because they'll call that out on you. Why did you wait? You discovered it. You really want to file it. So, different states have a different statute of limitations. In Florida, it's one year. Louisiana, it's two years...and it might be less. They always have insurance lobbyists trying to whittle this down for you and legislation. But you have time. It's not a week, it's not two weeks, not 30 days, it's not 60 days. It doesn't work like that. You have more time.

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Kendra Seymour

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Yeah, and we want, you know, we want you moving quickly on water events or things like that to prevent microbial growth and other issues. But I think the takeaway here is: call that public adjuster first while you're getting everything together, so you can kind of take this nice, neat package. Your public adjuster can talk to your insurance company, even on your behalf, and you don't have to worry about saying all of those words. Now, you said...what happens if a claim...maybe somebody, they're like, "Oh, no, I already filed with my insurance company and it was denied." Or maybe it was...the claim was closed. Are there differences between those two words? I mean, is there any recourse for people if that happened?

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yes, there sure is. So, a denial might not be an accurate denial. I have a friend that used to, well, he sold insurance, then he went in-house to be a desk adjuster, and he couldn't take it. And he left and went back to insurance because his supervisor was telling him, "Although this is a legitimate claim and covered under the policy, deny it." So, a denial doesn't necessarily mean that you can't do anything further. Have a public adjuster look at it. Statute of limitations in your state might be a year or two. You can have them look at it. If you've already done the repairs, that's probably not going to work. But have them look at it, and what if they...So, in the normal course of action, when you file a claim and get paid that undisputed amount that I mentioned to you earlier, and you don't have a public adjuster, they're going to say, "Okay, the claim is closed." The claim is not closed. That's just language that they use to make you think you're not getting any more money. They're trying to trick you, number one. And number two: now they can report to the state how many claims they've settled. So those are numbers that are not...that they're just showing, yeah, we processed, and we settled, and we processed. So that's what that's for. You...don't...when

they say a claim is closed, if it's still within the statute of limitations (and they're not going to tell you about statute of limitations, they're not), so... all is not lost. The claim is closed means nothing when it's still within that statute of limitations where you can hire a public adjuster. So, send the documentation to your...somebody that you've talked to, that you feel comfortable with, the claim documentation, the policy, the information about the damages.

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Kendra Seymour

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That is super helpful, and a little bit of hope there. And...in a situation that I know can fear...feel very hopeless at times. So, you talked about something, and I wonder if we can unpack it a little bit more. You know, what is a covered peril? And let's dig in a little bit to mold specifically, because water can lead to mold. And, you know, how do people know if mold is covered in their policy? Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

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Gwynne Beatty

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In my conjecture, the insurance companies, a long time ago, have figured out what most people call in about and figured out a way to not get it covered, such as the pipes themselves are not covered. So, the cause of loss is water damage. When it comes to mold, 99.9% of residential policies that I've seen have \$10,000 allocated toward mold in their policy. And it doesn't always say the word "mold." It says fungi. It says dry rot, wet rot. But you have that. Mold is not a covered peril. The covered peril that caused the mold is what the claim is. So that would be water damage; that would be wind; that would be flood. Flood policies don't cover mold, so that doesn't work there. But...so, you don't mention mold. Restoration companies...you can hire a restoration company. And you want one that bills the work directly to your insurance claim, so that you don't have to come out of pocket, and you just get the work done. So, let's say you have a \$400,000 coverage A amount, which is your home and everything attached to it. Let's say you have \$150,000 worth of damages. Your mold coverage, which is \$10,000, is in addition to that. So, the restoration company does a mold remediation process and does a pre-test, a pre...a third party comes in and takes air samples, and then a clearance test after to make sure it's all gone. And that gives you peace of mind. No more mold. So, mold has a huge effect, and the effects come upon us slowly.

I've been in people's houses where they're on their third round of antibiotics. They don't see any mold because it's behind the walls. But the house was loaded with mold, and the antibiotics for her respiratory issues were because of the mold. So, mold can cause a lot of things: joint pain, fatigue, brain fog, headaches, muscle aches, lack of motivation. It can be both an emotional thing and a physical thing, or/and/both, but it really takes...and it comes on you slowly. If you feel anything differently, if you feel that you...something is off—you're not yourself, you're not yourself for five days in a row, you can't think straight—I recommend you bring...you consult with somebody (a public adjuster) about what could be happening here. You might need to bring in a plumber to get a leaks...there's all sorts of steps in these processes that depend on your particular situation. But your first call is a public adjuster to see what's going on here with the property damage, and they'll give you a course of action.

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Kendra Seymour

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Yeah, and we have...that's so helpful, and we have a lot of great resources too on our website, ChangeTheAirFoundation.org, on how to find a good IEP (that's the person that comes in before your remediation company) and things like that. So, these are people, you know, that, when you know about them and you know the role, then you can make informed decisions. So, it sounded like from what you were saying, when we call in, and I've heard this before, you never want to use the word "mold," right?

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Gwynne Beatty

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Right. Correct.

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Kendra Seymour

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So, what do you say instead? Well, really, hopefully you're having your public adjuster call on your behalf. But if someone isn't...hasn't done that, should they say water damage? Or...

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yes.

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Kendra Seymour

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...some keywords? Okay.

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yes, you should say hurricane or water damage. Or...you should say those things. That's the claim. Those are the covered perils. So, the covered perils are the...I put them in a couple of categories. The nature covered perils, which is the wind, storm, tropical storm, unnamed storm, lightning, hail, fire, and smoke. And by the way, rain without wind is not a covered peril. So, if you have a heavy rainstorm and you have a roof leak, don't call that in. You need wind also. And what kind of wind speeds do you need? Well, what we look at for a shingle roof is 45 to 50 mile-an-hour wind speeds. We can look up the wind speeds on any given day in history in any area, anywhere, and you need...and wind gusts. That's what we look at. For a tile roof, we like to see 65 or 70 mile-an-hour winds. And we haven't even gotten up to a Cat 1...Category 1 hurricane level yet, which is 74 mile-an-hour winds. So, all of these strategic calculations have to go into whether or not you should file a claim. Just because your roof is old doesn't mean you can't file a claim. Because if you're paying for insurance to cover the roof, it's part of the claim. Just because you had pre-existing damage on one area, if the storm did damage in another area of your roof, that...we can tell, as public adjusters, what's old damage and what's new damage. This is the analysis that we do. We'll tell you whether, you know, this is old roof damage. No, this is just rain. You can't file a claim. Um, this is, you know, whatever it is. We'll do an analysis for you, and it's free.

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Kendra Seymour

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Wow, that that is...I'm learning so much from this, and I imagine that ever...a lot of people listening are as well. Because all these little things...you need the wind...it's not just something we would think about. And so that's incredibly helpful. So, you know, you had said this before, that you're always kind of underpaid with that first check. And I believe you said it was called the "undisputed amount, right? Let's talk about some real-life examples here. Because I think people will be blown away. You gave one example already that they got paid out \$19,000 but then I think you said you were able to get them \$300,000? I mean... can you talk to us...

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Gwynne Beatty

22:16

No, it was \$375k.

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Kendra Seymour

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Oh, my God, even more. So, \$375k, that's a huge difference. Can you give us some real-life examples of how this really benefited the people you were working with?

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Gwynne Beatty

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I'll give you a couple more examples. One client got \$5,000, hired me. After that, we got \$153,000. Another client, who I call my super seniors...like if they're older, they're the most vulnerable. The insurance companies know how old everybody is and how vulnerable everybody is. So, that client got \$1,800 and we got 80,000. Now, sometimes I have a client that got paid \$120,000 and we got \$60,000 more. So, you are always underpaid. You don't know what you can get with your personal property, but we do. You don't know what you can get with your loss of use coverage, but we do. And we know every single thing we can...we also know that we can put in for future money for you for a place to stay, and for a POD in your yard, because maybe you don't have the money to start your reconstruction yet by the time the claim settles. You need all the money, so you start that, and...but you still need another place to stay. We get the future money for you. So, there's so many nuances and so many things that the public adjuster knows that they can get for you.

I'm going to give...this is one of my favorite stories. So, somebody contacted me after Hurricane Ian and said "My insurance company is telling me that I don't have any wind coverage, I don't have any hurricane coverage, and they sent me this information. What's going on here?" So, it turns out that the carrier snuck something in on page 74 because...you may only have your jacket, which is four or five pages. You want a copy of your full policy (75 pages, 100 pages, whatever it is) in your email, not in paper form. You want it in email. Ask your agent for it, and ask your agent in email for it. Get that, and get that for two years back. So, she contacted me and ended up...the underwriter snuck something in without telling the insurance agency. So, she had a \$42,000 deductible, which means that she had to get more than \$42,000 worth of damages before she started seeing money. It was an \$876,000 policy. House was worth \$1.4; she had \$876. Couldn't...it's

decent, it's good. So, we ended up getting everything turned around. So, it went from a denial to \$480,000. That's what we do.

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Kendra Seymour

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Yeah, that's amazing. So, I know people are listening like, well, this can't be free, or there sounds like there's a catch. So, what's the fee associated, typically? I know it varies a little bit with a public adjuster.

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Gwynne Beatty

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It depends on the state. That's correct. The actual work itself is not free. You know, it's...we're a company. It's a company. You're...when you're a public adjuster, you are a company. You...or you work for a company. And it's not that a public adjuster will get donations like a nonprofit to run. It's a business. The fee is a percentage of what a public adjuster gets you. It's extremely doable and fair, and a lot less than what an attorney would charge. So, it depends from state to state. In Florida, when there's a declared state of emergency, when the governor...whatever the governor...whoever is in charge declares that, the fee for hurricane claims, flood claims, is 10%. Ten percent of what we get you. Other times, it's 20, but no more than that. In New York, it's 12 and a half, with no more than 20 overall. It varies from state to state, so you have to ask the public adjuster of your state.

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Kendra Seymour

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That's fair. And, you know, you don't have to be good at math to understand that if you're only getting paid out 10,000 on your own, but you get way more than that with the help of a public adjuster, that even their 10 or 20%...you're still going to end up with a lot more money in your pocket than you would have without someone. So, let's talk about how to find, like, a good public adjuster. Is this something where you have to be licensed and trained in a specific state, like a lawyer? How does this work?

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Gwynne Beatty

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Yeah, it's the same way. We're all licensed. We...in Florida, we're licensed under the DFS, the Department of Financial Services. Each state has its own name for that entity. In Florida, the DFS regulates insurance companies (insurance adjusters on the insurance company side), insurance agents, and public adjusters. So, that's who holds our license. The way it works, at least in Florida, is that we first become an IA, an insurance adjuster, with a 620 license. I went right into public adjusting. I didn't do any insurance company work first, because I discovered public adjusting right away. And I said, "I'm on this side. Not gonna do that side." So, then you become an appointed apprentice for six months to another public adjuster. Then you take a test in Pearson VUE, and you get your 320 license. And each state has a different number for that. So, everybody's licensed.

So, how do you find a good one? Call and start a conversation. See if you like them. See if you like the way they explain things. See if the way they talk resonates with you. See how

agreeable they are, and, you know, they explain your policy to you. See how that goes. Do they explain it so you can understand it? You also want to ask them about their communications. You want to make sure that, when you send them a text or give them a call or send them an email, that they're going to answer. Not everybody provides reports. That's all they'd be doing all the time, because they've got a lot of clients. So, there are...some do, some don't. So, you can ask them, "Do you provide status reports? Or only when I ask?" I want everybody to know that generally, a public adjuster will reach out to you when they have it...something that they need your decision on, or your input on. There's a lot of work in the back end that we're doing, and maybe we have an assistant. Maybe we have somebody to do all the administrative work to do, to ask the insurance company for things, to follow up, to get things done. There's so much legwork.

Now, the whole process is very emotional and awful, and it makes you feel powerless. My suggestion is...and this varies from state to state. In Florida, they don't make a claim determination for 60 days, two months. That 60 days is a long wait. And then when you get the pittance, and you look at that, and you've been paying insurance for 20 years and you've never filed a claim, and you think they're going to treat you fairly? No. They're not looking at you and saying, "Oh, we've accumulated this much money so far. We're going to pay this one out fairly." There are...I've never seen an instance where people have been paid out fairly. People think they have, but I know better. So, I suggest getting a public adjuster in from the beginning. I can't...nobody can guarantee that the process is going to go faster with or without. And plus, we'd never know because you only have one instance.

But it's just so much better when you have a public adjuster doing the talking for you, so you don't get any trick questions, like "Did you have a power surge?" The answer is, for you, "No," or "I don't know," because you're not an electrician. Because, guess what? It's not covered. So, did you just lose \$10,000 because you said yes? Because you were trying to be helpful? Because all your appliances, you're blown out, your TVs, your computers? Power surges are not covered. Your answer is "No," or "I don't know," or "Talk to my public adjusters" is the best answer. So, the thing is, I like...it's...the whole process makes you feel powerless. And powerlessness turns into anger, and anxiety, and depression. And if you're breathing mold, (which you are not going to mention to your insurance company, because mold is covered), just let the restoration company do it; let the restoration company handle it and bill it to your claim. Mold is dangerous. You need to get things moving on your claim. The insurance company adjuster will say, "We'll wait for this. We'll wait for that." You don't have to wait while your property is disintegrating and imploding. You can get the dry-out done, the tear-out by the restoration company. You can get the mold remediation done. You can, you can, you can. So, listen to your public adjuster.

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Kendra Seymour

31:12

That is so helpful, because, you know, even just navigating the inspection and remediation in the health side is so overwhelming and hopeless that to even think about tackling insurance...and to have someone who can really navigate and understand this with, for you is just such a breath of fresh air. Now, you mentioned it briefly, something about lawyers. Do lawyers ever get involved in this process? Hopefully not. But what would that look like if that happens, or under what circumstances?

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Gwynne Beatty

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Most public adjusters want to get your claim settled for you without getting an attorney involved. That is actually another really good question that you want to ask your public adjuster: “At what point would you get an attorney involved?” So, some public adjusters go right to attorney. You don't want to do that. You want to get the public adjuster to work the claim and try to get it settled. So, at what point do you do it? When all avenues...the public adjuster has exhausted all avenues, and there's no much, no further they can go. So, they'll advise you that. So, perfect question to ask when you're calling to see who you like, who you want to hire, and how they handle going to litigation. In Florida, there's something called an NOI (a Notice of Intent) that an attorney can file. And you might want to do that, because it's something that is notice of intent to sue. Let's settle this. It depends how big the claim is, so you really need to get legal advice on that. But you also want to hear what the public adjuster has to say. What...when would you do that? And what would the remedies be? The public adjuster should say back to you, “I want to work the claim and get it settled for you without the involvement in an attorney.” But sometimes the insurance company just doesn't respond correctly and treat you correctly.

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Kendra Seymour

33:13

Yeah. Yeah, that's super helpful, and just more important considerations for people to take into mind. So, I know you've already talked a bit about some of the mistakes that people have made when filing insurance claims, right? Like they're using some of the wrong words. But what are some other things that you're seeing? And are there times we just shouldn't call the insurance company and just be like, I'm just going to pay this out of pocket? Or...do you have any lessons there for us?

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Gwynne Beatty

33:38

if it's a covered peril, you should never go to “I'm just going to pay this out of pocket.” So, going back to the beginning analysis—cause of loss, deductible amount, value of the damages—if you move forward with a claim, no, you should not pay this out of pocket. But you're going to get your money in pieces. So, when you do get your money in pieces, you don't know how much you're going to get in the end. When you do your repairs, you're going to start top down: roof first, then ceiling and insulation, then exterior-interior windows/doors, then floors, kitchen, bathroom. So, you do what you want with your money. When you get the money in, you can...I...that's when I suggest going and signing a contract with a roofer, not before. Because you don't want to be beholden to somebody for four months until you get the money for a roof, and then they're backed up with materials. I don't know. I just advise people: wait until you have the money before you sign rebuild contracts. So, if you have a valid claim, no, don't...you don't have to take out an SBA loan. You don't have to pay out of pocket. You don't have to pay out of pocket for the restoration work if you use a restoration company that will bill their work to your insurance claim and get paid back. That includes dry-out, tear-out of unsalvageable materials, walls and floors and ceilings, and mold remediation. So, the rebuild portion comes from your claim settlement—two separate areas. So, you have to understand that portions of your claim

that the restoration company does and gets paid for directly is different than the settlement money that you get to rebuild your property...

KS

Kendra Seymour

35:34

Yeah.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

35:35

...but so, it...so your question is: should I ever pay out of pocket? Any public adjuster will say, "As long as it's a valid claim, no."

KS

Kendra Seymour

35:43

Okay, so that brings me then (and I'm thinking this, and I'm sure people listening...), like, if they don't really understand what their insurance policy says, what are some steps they can take, like, today or this week that maybe will help them get a better sense of that? Can you just give us some key things to maybe start with?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

36:01

Absolutely. I want you to look at your Declarations page. I want you to look for the word "dwelling" or "building," or the letter A next to "dwelling" or "building." And I want you to look at the dollar figure that's associated with that line item. That's how much coverage you have for your home and everything attached to it. Then I want you to look at what might be the next one, which could be called "other structures," "structures," or it could be called "other" ...something. It might be the letter B, "other structures." And I want you to look at that dollar figure. "Other structures" is everything detached from your house, like fence, shed, pool house, gazebo, detached deck, detached garage. I want you to look at that dollar figure and see if you're comfortable with that dollar figure covering everything detached from your house that I just mentioned. If it's not, I don't know if you can increase it. It depends on the policy. If it...for what I'm about to say, ask your agent in writing: how much would my premium increase be if I increased this to that? Maybe you want to have it at \$50,000 instead of 20. Three: I want you to look at the line that says "contents" or "personal property." It might probably say the letter C next to it, and I want you to look at that dollar figure. Is that enough to cover everything in your home that's movable, everything outside your home that's movable, everything in your shed, everything in your closets, everything in your garage? For your personal property, you do not need receipts. The insurance company may ask you for receipts, but that's just their way to get them not to pay you. For expensive items, they might want to see.

I had a client that had beautiful mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture from Korea, and they were \$15,000 for this cabinet and that. So, they might want to see it for that. So, think about what you have that's expensive. Before you evacuate, before you have any issues, before you might have damages, take pictures (not video) inside your home, inside your closet, inside everything, because you are going to use those pictures to create your personal property damages list. And you're going to include everything in it that got damaged, whether you're

keeping it or not. Take pictures of everything you put on the curb. You want documentation. And then lastly, the last one is going to either be called “loss of use” or “additional living expenses.” It means loss of use of your house. For this category, you do need receipts. So, if you have any of the expenses that I'm about to list, I suggest putting everything on one credit card so it's not all over the place, so you don't miss out on this. So, one: evacuation costs. Gas to get out of town, hotel, Airbnb. Even if you stay with a friend or a family member or something, and you pay them something, they can write up something that says: I, so-and-so, received \$2,500 for so-and-so to stay at my home from this date to this date. That's recoverable money under this category...restaurant receipts and sometimes grocery receipts. Also, short term rental, Airbnb. Maybe you need a lot...a place...that's longer. You need some longer place to stay. Storage: a POD on your yard, a storage facility. Extra gas that you spent driving around maybe looking for gas. I've seen some pretty bad situations. Also, when the restoration company comes in with the machines to dry your property out, your power bill is going to increase. So, provide your public adjuster with the power bill before the storm or the incident and the one after, and the difference is included in your claim. Then, you want to find out if you have any water caps, and what do they apply to? Is it just backup? Is it any kind of water damage? It...you know, what specifically does that line say? A public adjuster can answer you better than an insurance agent, because insurance agents don't work in claims.

KS

Kendra Seymour

40:21

That is so helpful, and so many people (and I think we'll get to this in just a moment), especially post the hurricanes over the last few weeks...there's so many good pieces of information in there, and I know that's going to be incredibly helpful. So, what if someone is maybe shopping for insurance? Are there things that they can be looking for in addition to what you've kind of already talked about? I know you've mentioned before, appraisal demand. Can you talk to us about what that is and any insight there?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

40:52

Appraisal demand is not offered in all policies, and when you do have it, it avoids litigation. It's different than mediation, and it's different than appraisal request. What it means is that your public adjuster can send an email to your insurance company that says: we are demanding appraisal. This is our appraiser's name and contact information. That means the insurance company...the desk adjuster's out of the equation. They have to bring in an outside appraiser. The two appraisers meet at the property. Your public adjuster and their appraiser walk the property together, and then you wait for the insurance company's appraiser to come back with a number. If you like the number—the public adjuster and the client—if everybody likes the number for a final settlement, you're done. If you don't like the number, then it goes to what's called “umpire.” It's a third person, who is an umpire, who looks at both appraisal estimates and makes a decision.

The umpire is chosen from a list, mutually chosen between the public adjuster and the insurance company. And your public adjuster probably knows every single person on that list and knows which umpires are in the insurance company's pockets, and which ones are fair to the insured. So, huge advantage for you. So, the umpire looks at the two appraisal

estimates and makes a decision, and the umpire's decision is final. No litigation. You don't have that recourse after that. It's a huge time saver. It's always the way to go. So, how do you figure out if you have that? You have to get your full policy, that 100-page document, and do a search. I haven't found an insurance agent yet that knows what this is. So, the answer from them is usually: I don't know. So, you want to find out if you have it, I know...and you want to find it...and you want to find out. No insurance agent sells for all insurance companies in your zip code, so you can shop around to other agencies all at the same time. You can switch insurance. You just can't switch insurance if you have an open claim, but you don't have to wait for renewal. And you want to have...how do you figure out? There's so many insurance companies. I can't tell you who's good, who's not, because it varies according to zip code.

KS

Kendra Seymour

43:24

But that's definitely something we want to look out for though, it sounds like, in our policy, to get that full document emailed to you so...

GB

Gwynne Beatty

43:32

Yes. Yes.

KS

Kendra Seymour

43:33

...you can check for yourself. I love that. Now, anyone who's ever (and I didn't learn about this until years ago), but we were house hunting, and I learned about something called a "clue report." Can you tell people what that is, and does that factor in to our insurance? Because I know I've heard before, I was always told: don't call insurance because they're going to ding you, even just for an inquiry, and it can raise your rates, and all of that. Help us understand that. Is that true? Like, how does that work?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

43:59

I advise against calling in and making an inquiry, because it does go in your record. Your clue report is your claims history and your inquiry history. This is an insurance agent question. So, I do know that it does keep a record of all your claims, all your inquiries. Asking questions does not make your premiums go up. Filing claims does not make your premiums go up like it does with auto. Ask your agent for more specific information on that, but I do know that all insurance companies have different protocols with however many water damage claims (those leaks) that they will pay before they drop you. If they drop you, get different insurance. It's not the end of the world. So, but you do want to make sure your water damage claims are worth it, strategically. Are they... are the damages high enough? So, it's a strategic analysis that your public adjuster will do for you for free. Maybe you want to get that \$10,000, and that is up to you, if you want to file a water damage claim, and there's a \$10,000 upper limit on what you can get. The...your...so you can get dropped from a policy, from an insurance company, whether you filed a claim or not. Maybe they're dropping everybody in that zip code. Maybe they're dropping everybody in a certain classification, like, they're not doing houses that are worth a million dollars or more

anymore. Maybe it's that. So, you just, you really want to do a strategic analysis as to whether you should file a claim for this particular set of damages or not.

KS

Kendra Seymour

45:47

And that's where your public adjuster is worth their weight in gold.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

45:51

Yes.

KS

Kendra Seymour

45:52

So, I...that is so important. I know you've talked about so much, and so maybe there isn't much more to add. But I have been thinking so much about everyone down south and in the states that have been impacted by the recent hurricanes. Is there any additional advice that we didn't cover, that you just want to mention for people who are—right now—very overwhelmed, very displaced, bankrupt in in many circumstances? Anything else you want to add?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

46:16

Yes. I want everybody to think about the physical effect that some of this stuff has on you when you have a flood, rising waters. And I, when I was in...I'm going back to the other coast, and when I've been there for a month. The water lines were anywhere from a few inches to five feet. That water is contaminated with bacteria, with sewage, with organisms. So that means your property (your walls, your floors, and everything) is also contaminated. When I was inside these properties, when I was doing assessments, I found—after three days of being in and out, in and out, in and out of these houses—that I was getting brain fog. I couldn't think clearly; I couldn't focus. I couldn't make my usual decisions, and I started...and I was lightheaded, and I couldn't really get my feet on the ground. Pay attention to these signs. I've been, in the past, inside people's properties, where there's mold everywhere, that they're living in. And I'll go in, and I'll start to feel fluttering around my skin, not even on it. It's the weirdest feeling. Thirty seconds. I'm out, and they're living in it, they're not feeling the effects of breathing that mold. And I can go in other places and not feel the effects, and they can't go in. So, my comment to everyone is: get everything taken care of sooner rather than later, whether you feel the effects or not. Because when...if you see a mushroom, that's mold. If you see mold, there's a lot more mold on the other side of that wall, underneath that floor, on the other side of that ceiling. It's going through your air. You want to make sure your policy has mold coverage.

Never, ever get what's called a...it's called a "lender-placed policy." That's where you miss some insurance payments, and the mortgage company says, "Oh, we'll take care of your coverage for you." You lose your coverage C, personal property; you lose your coverage D, loss of use; and you lose your mold coverage. And they don't tell you that because they don't work in claims. But they want you to pay because they care about their asset. And that's rightly so. Don't miss an insurance payment if you have a mortgage. Know that this

stuff is serious. Know that I just came...before this podcast, I just went to a fire. The fire happened five days ago. I walked around inside. What an acrid smell. So, a restoration company can do smoke and fire restoration. First step is to stabilize the property. Got to wait for the fire department to do clear...to issue a clearance. Take an inventory. Does the insurance company need to do a clearance too? I was in there for maybe 15 minutes, and I was starting to feel it.

It was similar to what I was breathing....I lived in New York City when the World Trade Center attacks happened. And I was close enough to them that we smelled an acrid smell in the air for two weeks, out in the open air, after that. Felt like I was breathing...you know, when you go into a tire store and you breathe all that awfulness of the rubber of the tires? It's like that, and you can't escape it. So, when you're breathing this stuff, it...the effect creeps up on you. So, you want a healthy house. If you live in an association where you live in a condo, you want...the association is the steward of your building health there. So, you want the association to take care of the mold, when there's mold. If you have a condo, you are...could be responsible for your own mold remediation. It depends where it is, so you want a public adju... So, you're responsible for paint in; they're responsible for drywall out. That's a whole conversation, and a public adjuster can do an analysis for you on that. So, we have a hard enough time out in the air now, anyway, with all the contaminants. Sick buildings really have an effect on us. Whether it's poor-quality drywall...I actually got affected by Chinese drywall once, and I had nosebleeds and headaches and coughing. It goes on and on. So, what I suggest to everybody is: at the first sign of a problem, address it. That's my recommendation.

KS

Kendra Seymour

50:55

Gwen, this has just been so incredibly helpful. And for everyone listening—and I love that you're giving some hope here, that there are people who can, you know, be on your side. A good public adjuster, a good indoor environmental professional, a good remediation company. This interview is going to be on our website. It's going to be there with all of our materials on how to find some of these people, and the right remediation companies, and the right inspectors, and a good public adjuster like Gwen, who can help you navigate what is (we understand) a very overwhelming process. And please protect your health and protect your home. Gwen, if people had follow-up questions for you or wanted to get into contact, how could they do that?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

51:38

I welcome you to call me, text me, email me, because...I'll take care of it. Don't leave me a voicemail. Voicemails don't pop in in a timely fashion. Send me a text. My cell number is 954-648-9258. My email address is my first name, last initial, at company name, which is G, W, Y, N, N, E, B (letter B like boy) @ we dry us, W, E, D (as in David), R, Y, U, S, .com.

KS

Kendra Seymour

52:24

And we'll link to all that in the show notes. So, whether you're listening on YouTube or on our podcast or watching on our website, there's usually show notes that you can click into

and get that. So, thank you. I cannot thank you enough for this. This has been so enlightening. While I hope that nobody has water events or flood damage or leaky pipes, that is, unfortunately, not the real world. But now I feel a little better equipped to handle this with my insurance company, with a public adjuster on my side, in the event that it happened. So, I appreciate it.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

52:55

I'm going to add one more thing...

KS

Kendra Seymour

52:57

Sure.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

52:58

...that is a little more complicated, but I want everybody to know one more thing. So, when you have a sewerage pipe under your slab, and the sewerage pipe has a crack or a collapse, there's two ways to fix this. One is tunneling from the outside, and one is doing a trench...breaking the floor, breaking the slab, and doing a trench. So, when I said earlier, the pipes themselves are not covered, that is correct. But access to the pipe is covered. So that...not the tunneling, but breaking the slab, doing a trench, and repairing the slab, and putting in new floors is the claim. So, in order to do that, you need to have a plumber do a scope, a video scope, and find the location of the crack and the leak. So, even that has a solution.

KS

Kendra Seymour

53:50

I love that. And so, I'm going to add on to that, Gwen. I know you're going to wrap up, but I think sometimes people will think, oh, they're going to rip off part of my floor, a part of my kitchen cabinet, and now it's not going to match because I picked that tile out seven years ago. Or the cabinets are...they don't make them anymore. So, do they only cover half the cabinet? Are we living in a mismatch world here? Or how does...there's something to that? Can you help us understand that?

GB

Gwynne Beatty

54:14

Yes. Two things: one is cabinets, one is flooring. So, matching depends on the state. That varies from state to state, but a public adjuster...you have the right to be restored to pre-loss condition. You have the right to representation. So, in order to be restored to pre-loss condition, that does not mean mismatched cabinets. So, even if it's one box or one door, what a public adjuster will go for is all new uppers, all new lowers, and your island, so that you are restored to pre loss condition. And include the countertops. Because we just assume the cabinet people, when they take out the cabinets, are going to break the countertops. And it often happens, too, that there's mold behind the kitchen cabinets that you can't see, but the mold tester found mold back there. And the mold tester will come back with a protocol, which is an instruction sheet that the restoration company must do in

order to remediate the mold. And if it says remove the cabinets, that's part of the claim. When it comes to flooring, we invoke continuous and matching. So, the theory is, if you can't find the exact match to the flooring, you're entitled to get paid for all the flooring up to the thresholds. Sometimes, that flooring goes throughout that house. And even if it's a different...if it's a common floor, it might be a different dye lot, and you can't get an exact match. No one ever can. So, we worked on a claim where there was a leak under the toilet, and the insurance company paid a couple thousand for the flooring right around the toilet. But this was expensive flooring that went all the way throughout the house. So, while the insurance company wanted to pay 2,000 and change, we settled the claim for \$300,000. Because that's what you're entitled to under the law, under your policy, and according to this particular statute.

KS

Kendra Seymour

55:56

This is just mind blowing. Again, this is all the things I feel like your insurance company doesn't want you to know.

GB

Gwynne Beatty

56:01

Absolutely.

KS

Kendra Seymour

56:02

And I love giving people this information. We want to empower you (you know, whether you're a homeowner or not) to really take control of your home and your health and feel empowered doing so. So, if you found this interview helpful—which I can't imagine anyone didn't—please head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org. Sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to get great interviews like this directly to your inbox. Thank you so much, everyone. We'll see you next time.