

WFG Informational Bulletin



From: WFG Florida Underwriting Department
To: All Florida Policy Issuing Agents of WFG National Title Insurance Company
Date: October 6, 2016
Bulletin No: FL2016-13
Subject: Florida Hurricane Bulletin

At this point, many of our Florida agents have implemented their hurricane contingency plans and are tying up any loose ends. Nothing we can add will replace a well thought out emergency plan.

WFG also understands that business for many of our Florida agents will go on while Hurricane Matthew is impacting the east coast of Florida. So we wanted to update you on what WFG is doing to take care of our WFG family while keeping your business going.

What WFG is Doing:

1. Our Vero Beach title production office is closed, but the Panama City, FL and other production facilities are up and running. Orders submitted during this period should roll over automatically and be unaffected.
2. Our Lake Mary office and the South Florida office are closed, which will impact some of the agency resources functions. So we ask that you please copy any urgent requests to Agency Support agencysupport@wfgnationaltitle.com so your needs can be addressed from other parts of the country.
3. All affected members of the WFG family have been encouraged to take the appropriate steps to secure their homes, take care of their families, and depending on where located, to evacuate.
4. Our Florida underwriting team is safe and dry and working away. But like everyone else, they may be impacted by utilities problems and internet connection issues during and after the storm.
If you are unable to reach Joe Tschida or Debbie Davids, please feel free to reach out to Alan Fields afields@wfgnationaltitle.com or Steve Winkler nwinkler@willistonfinancial.com

As to your own offices, nothing we can add will replace your own well thought out emergency plan and the many "checklists" available online. But there are a couple of title agent specific considerations we would reiterate.

1. Title agents often handle the payments for customers homeowners, property and casualty insurance. So before you close down your office, go through all recently closed files and make certain that any homeowners premium payments have been made before the storm hits -- either by fed-ex or better yet electronic payment to the insurer. You don't want to be blamed for a coverage lapse.

2. Most property and casualty insurers will not bind new coverage for some time in advance of a hurricane. This can present timing and other problems for you and your customers.
 - a. The FR-BAR contract provides that the time for closing is automatically extended for “a reasonable time up to 3 days after restoration of utilities and other services essential to Closing and availability of applicable Hazard, Wind, Flood or Homeowners’ insurance.” (2014 form, Section 5(b)). The time is measured from when power is restored to the property, not when your own power comes back on. So this can become a tight timeframe when your own office is closed and without utilities after the storm. We urge you to keep this in mind and communicate any issues with your customers.
 - b. The FR-BAR contract also allows either party to terminate the contract if utilities or insurances are not available within an agreed period, which defaults to 14 days. This back end time frame may come into play for some contracts if Hurricane Matthew does the expected “loop” in the Atlantic.
 - c. Not all contract forms treat storm delays as granting an automatic extension. As always, it is important to review and know the provisions of the contracts you are closing. If you have an open contract without an automatic extension, you should communicate with the parties and their Realtors that they should consider a written extension of the contract. Otherwise they may be faced with a technical default, loss of deposit or an uninsured property.
3. Backups. If your agency uses a secure “in the cloud” operating system, you expect all of your operating data will be available if the worst happens. But we’ve been reminded that some systems store recent data locally, and only update at certain times of the day. So it is a good idea to check with your software provider about the possibility of a manual backup before you shut down the office. If you maintain your own servers, a last minute backup with copies to offsite storage should be considered. You don’t want to lose any of your “up to the minute” transaction information should the worst happen. Consider the same for all of your critical business and accounting data.
4. Before shutting down before the storm, do a final upload of your positive pay records so none of your outstanding checks are improperly dishonored by your bank.
5. Store copies of all critical passwords, bank account information (especially those memorized by your computers), and critical contacts (securely) offsite.
6. Take copies of your own business and property insurances with you.

Above all, be safe and take care of yourselves and your own and your Agency families. If, during and in the aftermath of the storm, there is anything WFG can do to assist, please reach out to us.

Information Bulletins are designed to provide our agents with information we think will help in managing their business or just being better title professionals, but which does not rise to the level of being an underwriting mandate and are not within the scope of the agency agreement.