

Even a small amount of water can be a big problem.

And these days Canadians are seeing more than a little water. According to the Insurance Bureau of Canada, water damage is now the leading cause of home insurance claims, exceeding fire, theft, and wind or hail claims. On average, the Canadian insurance industry pays \$1.5 billion per year in claims due to water damage.

That's why Intact Insurance is taking a proactive, disciplined approach to water damage, with a focus on education and loss prevention. And that's why we've put together this handy reference guide – to give you a quick overview of the issues around water damage and what we can do about them.

Some extreme weather events

Peterborough, July 2004
Rainstorm produced the greatest one-day rainfall on record for that area

Toronto, August 2005
A 90 minute rainstorm became the most expensive weather disaster in Ontario's history

Ontario, 2008
The wettest year on record for North Bay, Toronto, Peterborough and Wiarton

WATER DAMAGE

Why water damage is on the rise

Climate change

Severe weather events now occur with greater frequency. Storms that were once considered 1 in 40 year storms are now considered 1 in 6 year storms. This means that statistically, the frequency, or chance of experiencing a severe storm is increasing. Weather patterns have become increasingly unpredictable and we need to adapt.

Aging infrastructure

Much of Canada's infrastructure was designed to accommodate weather patterns that existed years ago, and is unable to handle the increased precipitation that is now a reality. It's estimated that 60% of Canada's infrastructure is more than 40 years old, and would require approximately \$90 billion to upgrade.

Lifestyle

Today's homes have more water using appliances than ever before. The more water using appliances in the home, the greater the chance of a leak and resulting damage. And often, these appliances are located on ground or second floors of homes, where water can cause a great deal of damage. With less people at home during the day this means more time passes before leaks are discovered. A trend towards finished basements, along with the use of more expensive materials in homes, has also increased the costs associated with water damage.

The impact of water damage on customers

Just an inch of water can cause costly damage including:

- Damage to sentimental or irreplaceable items
- Damage to carpeting, furniture and electronic equipment
- Structural damage to homes, including damage to the foundation
- Depreciation of house values
- Potential health issues resulting from mould

Common types of water damage

- Basement flooding resulting from sewer backup
- Basement flooding resulting from sump pump failure
- Burst pipes due to freezing or aging plumbing systems
- Overflow or leaks from toilets, tubs and sinks
- Roof leaks from heavy rains or ice damming
- Leaks from appliances (fridges, hot water tanks, etc.)

What can be done to help prevent water damage?

The following tips can help customers protect their homes, their personal belongings and their health by helping to prevent water damage before it happens.

Sewer backup	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Installation of a backwater valve can help prevent sewage from backing up into the home. Backwater valves should be installed by a professional plumber and allow access for regular maintenance• Disconnect any downspouts connected to the municipal sewer system• Make sure downspouts extend at least 6 feet (where possible) from basement walls and drain away from the house
Sump pump failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Install a reliable backup source (battery or generator) so the sump pump works in the event of a power outage• Make sure to replace the batteries every 2-3 years• Follow manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance
Burst pipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replace aging or corroded pipes• Consider installation of a water alarm/shut off system• Ensure the home is checked during absences through the heating season
Toilets, tubs and sinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replace aging fixtures, tubs and toilets• Never leave running taps unattended
Roof leaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure aging or worn shingles are replaced• Make sure the attic is properly insulated• Have eavestroughs cleared of leaves at least once a year – fall is a good time• Install a waterproof membrane or barrier when replacing the roof
Appliance leaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replace aging appliances• Replace plastic connection lines with steel braided hoses• Have hot water tank checked by tank provider (if rented)• Avoid running appliances when no one is home

REMEMBER

No two customers are alike; no two homes are alike. When assessing the potential for water damage, keep in mind that each risk is unique and may require that different questions be asked, or different solutions be offered.

Looking for more information?

There are a number of informative websites available, including:

Intact Insurance	www.intactinsurance.com
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca
Insurance Bureau of Canada	www.ibc.ca
Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction	www.iclr.org

Many municipalities have programs in place to help deal with issues around water and can offer valuable information and resources to help customers protect their homes against water damage.

Other tips to help prevent water damage

- Items kept in the basement should be stored off the ground and in plastic containers
- Avoid pouring fats and grease down the drain
- Make sure everyone in the household knows the location of the water shut-off valve
- Consider investing in a rain barrel to prevent runoff by temporarily holding rainfall for later use – an environmentally friendly solution!
- Have a licensed plumber inspect the home
- Encourage customers to talk to their local municipality about special programs that may be in place to protect against basement flooding

What to do in the event of water damage

Communication with customers about water damage is critical, especially at the time of a loss. The following tips can be offered to help customers faced with water damage:

- Don't do anything unless it's absolutely safe to do so
- Avoid direct contact with human waste, dirty water or electrical hazards
- Wear protective gear if entering a part of your home that has been affected
- Turn off electrical power to the affected area
- Unplug and remove electrical appliances
- Move furniture or secure on raised blocks to help prevent water damage
- Ventilate and dry the area by opening windows and doors or use fans and dehumidifiers
- If the source of the water can be identified, shut it off
- Remove damaged or wet materials
- If necessary, contact a qualified contractor who specializes in water damage