

The 17 perils

The word "peril" invokes different images for different people, although the reaction is usually the same for everyone: avoid, avoid, avoid.

Despite your best efforts, sometimes perils to your home and property cannot be avoided. That's where a good homeowner's insurance policy comes in. Homeowner's policies are defined by the perils that they insure against. The average homeowner's policy protects you not only from common hazards like fire or wind, but from perils that you might think would be more likely to see in exotic locales than in your own neighborhood. Like volcanic eruptions and explosions.

Although there are myriad choices confronting policy shoppers, there are essentially three main categories of perils that you can insure basic dwellings against. Most policies cover the first 11, and you may have to purchase additional coverage for the others. Here's a breakdown of the basic perils as covered by standard homeowner's insurance policies.

The 11 basic perils:

- Fire and lightning
- Windstorm and hail
- Explosion
- Riot and civil commotion
- Aircraft
- Vehicles
- Smoke
- Vandalism and malicious mischief
- Theft
- Damage by glass or glazing material that is part of a building
- Volcanic eruption

The next step up in coverage usually includes the 11 basic perils plus six more:

- Falling objects
- Weight of ice, snow, and sleet
- Three kinds of water-related damage from home utilities or appliances
- Electrical surge damage

A third type of coverage protects against the above perils plus any other peril not specifically excluded by the policy. Examples of common exemptions include:

- Damage to the land on which your house is built

- Floods
- Earthquakes
- War
- Nuclear accident
- Intentional damage
- Business losses
- Wear and tear
- Damage caused by pets
- Theft from a house under construction
- Freezing of pipes in an unoccupied or vacant house
- Vandalism of a house vacant for over 30 days
- Weight of water or ice on a fence, patio, pavement, swimming pool or dock.
- Losses to property belonging to tenants
- Losses due to animals, birds, and fish

You can purchase protection against some of the excluded perils through endorsements or additional policies. For example, earthquakes are excluded in most basic policies, but you can purchase earthquake coverage separately.