

# Claims 'How To' Property Subsidence

## WHAT IS SUBSIDENCE

Subsidence is a general term for downward vertical movement of the Earth's surface, which can be caused by both natural processes and human activities.

## WHAT CAUSES SUBSIDENCE

- Shrinkage of certain soil types when moisture is lost
- Vegetation which is close to your foundations.
- Local events causing instability such as mining.
- Leaking drains and water supplies can wash away or soften soil supporting foundations.

## SIGNS OF SUBSIDENCE

### Cracks

§ Sudden cracks appearing in walls internally or externally.

§ These are normally found around doors and windows.

§ They tend to be thick cracks and may be wider at the top than the bottom of the crack.

### Unexplained property issues

For instance, plaster damage, wallpaper tears or doors or windows not opening/closing correctly.

## WHAT TO DO IF SUBSIDENCE IS SUSPECTED

Contact James Hallam as soon as possible to begin the claims process. Moving fast with subsidence can prevent the need for more intrusive work later.

## INVESTIGATION

Insurers will often assign, at their cost, loss adjusters or specialist firms to attend and assess. Often a period of monitoring may be required to see if the property is moving and to try and identify the cause.

## KEY INFORMATION

You can assist in ensuring that the insurer acts quickly and assigns an expert at an early stage by providing the following;

When was the damage discovered?
When did you purchase the property?
What room(s) are affected?
Is the damage next to a boundary, garden wall or driveway?
Provide images
Ideal evidence is a diagram or floor plan with highlighted areas affected.
Is anyone else responsible for the damage?
Has recent work been carried out on the property?
Can the property still be used for its intended purpose?

## ESTABLISHING COVER

Early investigation should be able to determine if your property is suffering subsidence or if another cause is responsible for the damage. James Hallam will assist in you in reviewing policy cover if an alternative cause is indicated.

## WHAT IS NOT SUBSIDENCE

- New properties or properties with newly completed works may have features which look like subsidence, such as small fine cracks or a degree of settling. This is often called settlement in your policy exclusions.
- Properties do naturally encounter some shrinkage and swelling with temperature changes, these are often found in the form of minor wall and ceiling cracks. This is called thermal expansion in the policy.
- Damage to the property which does not affect the building itself.
- Erosion, either coastal or river may have a similar affect to subsidence but will normally be excluded.
- Defective workmanship or materials.

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## ONCE COVER IS CONFIRMED

Usually your **excess will need to be paid** before remedial work commences. Subsidence excesses are generally larger than other property damage excesses. Further technical inspection and a scope of works by qualified professionals may be required. There may be some immediate work that can be carried out to prevent further damage or short term works which may be appropriate. Underpinning is an extreme solution where building stabilisation is required but is not always necessary. When the property is stabilised further remedial work to the cosmetic damage such as crack filling and door/window repair can follow.

## ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION, BUSINESS INTERRUPTION OR LOSS OF RENT

Subsidence and the repair work can be highly disruptive. Depending on the property usage various resulting costs from a residential property being uninhabitable or a commercial property being unable to be used for trading can be incurred. James Hallam can assist in considering various cover and advising on how long you can seek support under your policy during the period of interruption.

## SETTLEMENT OF YOUR CLAIM

Depending on the severity and length of the repair process James Hallam may have facilitated various **interim payments** during the course of the claim. When all repairs have been completed and costs agreed for any additional elements such as loss of rent will be raised to you and any insurer costs such as loss adjuster fees will be settled and noted against the claim.

Settlement will be less your policy excess as specified in your policy documentation and VAT if you are VAT registered.

