



KANSAS INSURANCE DEPARTMENT

Vicki Schmidt, Commissioner

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Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt tours communities impacted by rare December derecho

Topeka, Kan. – Recently, Kansas experienced a meteorological first. Multiple counties across the state were impacted by the first recorded December derecho in U.S. history. Instead of rolling prairielands covered in snow, Kansans recently watched footage of farmland set ablaze by windswept wildfires.

On December 15, Kansas Insurance Department staff and I followed updates as wind conditions intensified and produced a straight-line windstorm known as the aforementioned “derecho.” Unlike the typically narrow paths of tornados, derechos are widespread, long-lived weather events in which sustained wind gusts of over 58 mph create damaging paths that are at least 50 miles wide and stretch over 250 miles in length. The widespread nature of derechos often means a costly impact for multiple communities and the recent storm in Kansas is no exception.

During Christmas week, staff and I had the opportunity to visit several communities impacted by the recent wildfires and destructive winds topping 100 mph. Smoke still filled the air when community leaders took me and my staff on a tour of charred-over farmland that surrounded their community. Thousands of acres were burned, cattle were killed, and millions of dollars of property was lost in multiple prairie fires. Fortunately, the destruction was less severe thanks to the hard work of local responders, volunteer firefighters and local farmers. While we saw a lot of heartbreaking things on our tour, it warmed my heart to see insurance agents hand delivering checks to Kansans with losses, less than a week after the storm. It was both a reminder of the importance of insurance and the good work insurance agents are doing on behalf of Kansans.

After damaging weather-related events occur in the state, the Kansas Insurance Department predictably sees an uptick in insurance claim activity. An important service provided by the Department is helping Kansans navigate the claims process if negotiations become onerous. The December derecho will lead to multiple insurance claims. Some claims will involve private insurance companies; other claims will involve Federal programs. Some claims will be paid in days; other claims will take months. Regardless of insurance needs, Kansans should know that, if it involves insurance, the Kansas Insurance Department is here to assist, and you can contact us via our website insurance.kansas.gov or by phone 1-800-432-2484 or email: kid.commissioner@ks.gov.

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Vicki Schmidt serves as the state’s 26th Insurance Commissioner. She is a local pharmacist and a former Kansas State Senator.