



Homemade savings

How a mitigation inspection may help slash your insurance premium

By Robyn A. Friedman

Fed up with your homeowner's insurance premium? So was Toni Beatty. She and her husband, owners of a four-bedroom home in Boca Raton, were tired of watching their premiums soar each year. So they called their insurance company to see how they could lower the rate.

"They told us we could do a mitigation inspection and possibly reduce it," Beatty says.

The result: \$2,400 lopped off their premium – not a bad return on an inspection that cost \$125.

"We were shocked by how much we saved," Beatty says. "We would never have known about this if we didn't call."

A mitigation inspection identifies features on a house — such as storm shutters, wind-resistant garage doors or special attachments securing the roof to the walls — that mitigate damage in the event of high-wind conditions. Depending on when your home was built, these

features might already be present or, like many homeowners, you might have added storm shutters after the fact. The more mitigation features a house has, the less chance of damage to your home — and the less risk to your insurance company. That may result in a premium credit.

"The amount of any discount depends on the insurance policy and the individual property," says Rob Galbraith, director, property underwriting for insurance company USAA. "While premium discounts for wind mitigation features can be substantial, the average savings a homeowner may receive is dependent upon several factors and can vary greatly from property to property."

Only policies that include windstorm coverage are eligible for premium credits, he adds.

During the inspection, which usually lasts about 45 minutes, the inspector will photograph the house, examine the attic and take measurements. Inspections can be done by a contractor, engineer, architect, building code inspector or licensed home inspector. The results are entered onto a Florida Uniform Mitigation Verification Inspection Form, which is valid for up to five years as long as no material changes have been made to the structure. Inspections generally cost less than \$200.

"Unfortunately, insurance agents don't tell customers about this inspection," says Nancy Hagey, co-owner of AmeriSpec Home Inspection Service, which operates in Broward and Palm Beach counties. "It's a good idea to do it every five years, and if you've never done it, or you've put on a new roof or window protection, you'd be surprised how much you can save." ●