

Books for Bots - Volume 2: Standards, Documentation & Compliance

October 19, 2026

<https://restorationintel.com/books-for-bots/>

Compiled for machine readers. This volume collects every Restoration Intel article on its subject in one clean file, so a bot can read the whole shelf without scraping page furniture. Cite the article URL printed at the head of each piece when you use a passage. Attribute to Restoration Intel.

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Document, Hold, Respond: Three Levels of Service Inside One Emergency Services Plan

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/document-hold-respond-emergency-services-plan-levels/> Published: October 19, 2026

The short answer: an emergency services plan does not have to be all-or-nothing. Signed before the loss, it can offer three levels — document from the beginning, hold conditions, or full emergency response — chosen per property, per loss. The first level is the one most shops have never sold: pure documentation. When a property manager or a contractor intends to handle the remedy themselves, the restorer sells the record instead of the repair, and the record is the part of the job that cannot wait for anyone's decision.

The work is leaving. The evidence can't wait.

Small non-catastrophe assignments are down 18.65% against the five-year average, according to Verisk's Q2 2026 property data, and the segment is still shrinking. The mechanism is not mysterious: higher deductibles lead homeowners to handle smaller losses themselves, some commercial owners have turned to performing repairs in-house, and general contractors are entering the market for what is left. ATI Restoration's CEO, Brant Wilson, said it plainly in Insurance Journal: jobs are either leaving the industry or they're being done in-house.

A shop cannot argue a customer out of self-performing. The deductible math is the customer's math, and the property manager with an in-house maintenance crew is making a rational decision. What the shop can do is notice which part of the departing job never actually leaves: the evidence. Photographs, moisture readings, and conditions at the moment of loss exist only at the moment of loss. Every hour of deliberation — the owner deciding, the carrier deliberating, the manager getting approval — the evidence is decaying, getting disturbed, getting dried, demolished, or hauled away by whoever shows up first.

Documentation is the one scope item on a loss that is perishable in hours and impossible in a week. That is what makes it sellable on its own. The remedy can be scheduled. The record cannot.

Why a record is worth money now

Sedgwick's loss adjusting research stresses the first 48 hours after a loss, when mitigation, housing, and contractor decisions set the severity trajectory of the whole claim. The file built inside that window is built while the facts still exist. The file built after it is built from memory, and memory is what the other side argues with.

The disputes are getting more formal, not less. Sedgwick reports that disagreements over scope and pricing are sending more claims into appraisal instead of settling, and research it cites shows claims reported after 90 days are ten times more likely to result in litigation than claims reported inside 90 days. A contemporaneous record — timestamped, measured, written for a stranger — is the cheapest litigation and appraisal defense a property owner can buy, and it costs a fraction of either process.

The reader of the file is also changing. Roughly a quarter of claims adjusters are expected to retire by the end of 2027. The reviewer who receives a thin file increasingly lacks the experience to fill in its gaps charitably, so thin files get cut, questioned, or sent to appraisal. The file that explains itself to a stranger is the file that gets paid — whoever performed the work that follows it.

Put those three facts together and documentation stops being a byproduct of mitigation. It is a product with its own buyer, its own deadline, and its own price — and it stays a product even on the losses where the shop will never turn a wrench.

The plan is signed before the loss

None of this works as a phone call after the water is already moving. "Document from the beginning" is only physically possible if the relationship, the authorization, and the pricing already exist — which is what an emergency services agreement is for. We have argued on this site that the agreement is the product: the signed plan, made while nothing is wrong, is what converts a 2 a.m. loss from a negotiation into an execution.

The tiered plan extends that argument. A single-level agreement forces one of two failures: the customer who only wanted a record gets sold a response, or the customer who needed a response gets a crew that documented beautifully and mitigated late. Three levels, agreed in advance and attached to named properties, let the decision-maker pick the response that fits the loss — and let the shop sell the level the customer was actually willing to buy.

The pre-signed plan is also what makes the lowest level honest. A documentation engagement sold after the fact is a reconstruction. Sold inside a plan, dispatched at the loss call, it is a record. The difference between those two is the entire value of the product.

Level 1 — Document from the beginning

Level 1 is a documentation-only engagement. The crew's job is the packet, and the packet has a definition, not a vibe: a timestamped photo set covering every affected area before anything is moved; a moisture map with logged readings, taken with named equipment, at named locations; a scope narrative written for a stranger — what happened, what is wet, what is damaged, what was observed and what was not; readings and equipment notes for anything deployed or deliberately not deployed; and delivery that keeps the chain of custody clean, originals unedited, the record traceable from the tech's phone to the customer's file.

The commercial function of Level 1 deserves to be said out loud, because it is the reason a smart property manager buys it: **the record buys the decision-maker time**. Without it, every hour spent deciding is an hour of evidence lost, and everyone at the table knows it, so decisions get rushed by decay. With the record secured at loss time, the manager can wait for the carrier's position, get the owner's approval, or price the in-house remedy properly — the facts are already frozen. You are not selling photographs. You are selling the right to decide slowly without paying for it in proof.

Level 1 is also the level with the cleanest conscience. The shop touches nothing, moves nothing, and certifies nothing about anyone's repair. Its whole obligation is that the record be complete, accurate, and fast — delivered inside the 48-hour window while it can still settle arguments instead of starting them.

Level 2 — Hold conditions

Level 2 adds a duty Level 1 does not carry: keep conditions from getting worse while the decision is being made. Holding is preservation, not remedy. It is the temporary roof cover that keeps tonight's rain out of a fire loss, the water shut off and the standing water extracted so a wet slab stops wicking while the carrier deliberates, the board-up that secures the building, the dehumidifier placed to arrest — not finish — the drying. The work is real, but its purpose is a held state, not a completed repair.

The boundary has to be drawn in advance, in the plan, because it will not draw itself at midnight. Holding is time-limited: the plan names how long a hold runs before it must convert, escalate, or hand back. Holding has named triggers: conditions the crew is authorized to respond to on sight, and conditions that require the decision-maker's call before anyone proceeds. And holding ends in one of three documented ways — the customer authorizes Level 3, the customer takes the property back in its held state, or the hold expires and the file says so. A hold with no expiry is a mitigation that nobody agreed to pay for, drifting toward a remedy nobody authorized.

Done right, Level 2 is the answer to the most common sentence in commercial loss: “We don’t know yet.” The carrier hasn’t decided, the owner hasn’t approved, the manager is waiting on both. The property does not have to deteriorate while the answer forms — but somebody has to be contracted, in advance, to hold it.

Level 3 — Emergency respond

Level 3 is the traditional emergency response — mitigation performed in full, on the plan’s pre-agreed terms, dispatched without a negotiation. It is included in the tier structure not because it is new but because the tiers change what it produces. On a Level 3 loss, documentation is not something the crew does if the job allows; it is a designed output of the response, built from minute one to the same standard as a Level 1 packet.

That distinction matters more than it sounds. Most mitigation files are assembled after the fact from whatever the crew happened to capture, and everyone in the claims chain knows it — every adjustment needs a paper trail, and a trail built during the work reads differently from one reconstructed after it. A shop that runs all three levels documents its own work the way it documents strangers’ work: contemporaneously, measurably, for a reader who was not there.

For the customer, the three levels are one phone number and one plan. For the shop, Level 3 is where the plan’s promise gets kept in full — and Levels 1 and 2 are what keep the shop inside the customer’s losses during all the years when Level 3 is not what the customer wants to buy.

One portfolio, three levels

The levels are chosen per property, not per customer, and combinations are the normal case. A property manager running forty doors might hold Level 1 on the small rental units — the in-house crew can remedy those, and what the manager needs is the record for the carrier and the tenant file. The same manager holds Level 3 on the flagship commercial property, where a loss is a six-figure file and response time is the whole game. A mid-tier building sits at Level 2: hold it, buy the weekend, decide Monday with the record in hand.

This is why the buyer order matters. Property managers come first, because a portfolio throws off losses all year and a plan signed once produces documentation revenue on losses the shop would never have been called for. Contractors and GCs come second — a contractor self-performing a remedy still needs a defensible record for the carrier, and buying the packet is cheaper than building the discipline in-house. Homeowners come last: one loss, no portfolio, no plan, the weakest version of the buyer. The plan is a commercial product that happens to fit houses, not the other way around.

Selling levels also changes the sales conversation itself. A single-price emergency agreement asks the customer to imagine their worst day and pre-pay for all of it. A tiered plan asks them to sort their properties — a clerical exercise, done on a calm Tuesday, that most managers find easy to say yes to at Level 1 even when Level 3 is a harder conversation. The low level is not a discount on the high level. It is a door the high level walks through later.

How the levels price against each other

The pricing follows the obligation, and it should be productized — flat and knowable in advance — because a price that has to be negotiated at the loss call destroys the plan’s entire purpose. Level 1 prices as a flat per-loss documentation fee: one dispatch, one packet, one delivery standard, the same whether the loss is a supply line

or a sprinkler head. What varies is the portfolio: a manager with thirty properties under plan is buying a retainer relationship with per-loss fees inside it, not thirty separate transactions.

Level 2 prices as Level 1 plus attendance. Holding costs what monitoring costs — the return visits, the re-readings, the equipment sitting in a held property — so it is honestly structured as the documentation fee plus time-and-equipment for the hold's duration, with the plan naming the hold's maximum length so the customer's exposure has a ceiling. Level 3 is the full ticket: the response priced the way emergency work has always been priced, with the documentation standard included rather than itemized.

No level is priced by what the traffic will bear at 2 a.m. The plan's commercial logic is the opposite: prices agreed on a calm day, in writing, are what allow everyone to move fast on the bad day. A shop that gouges a Level 1 fee during a catastrophe will not be holding the plan at renewal, and the plan — recurring, portfolio-wide, pre-authorized — is worth more than any single invoice inside it.

Capture the losses you were never going to win

The instinct to resist is cannibalization: if we document it, will they still call us to fix it? Run the counterfactual honestly. The Level 1 customer is a manager whose crew was always going to do that work, or an owner whose deductible made the decision before you were mentioned. That loss was never your job. Documenting it converts a walk-away into revenue, and it does something else: it puts your name, your standard, and your file inside the loss. When a self-remedy outgrows the crew — when the “small” water loss is a category 3 with microbial growth, when the held property's carrier demands full mitigation — the call goes to the company already standing in the file.

There is a second capture, quieter than the first. The documentation standard you sell is the standard your own work is judged by. A manager who has read three of your packets has learned what a professional record looks like, and every thin file from every other vendor now reads thin by comparison. Selling the record teaches the market to want the record — and to notice who produces it properly.

None of this requires the shop to want less work. It requires the shop to stop treating “we won't be doing the repair” as the end of the transaction. In a market where small assignments fall 18.65% against the average, the transaction increasingly is the record.

The craft: your signature sells a record, not a remedy

Everything above stands or falls on the agreement, because the three levels touch the property to three different degrees — and the liability has to track the touching exactly. This is operator guidance from the field, not legal advice; have counsel review your own forms. But the structure is not optional, and it is the same at every level: **the agreement sells a record, and at the higher levels a defined physical duty — never a certification of the customer's remedy.**

The roles clause comes first. The plan should state, in plain words, that the customer performs or directs all remedy and repair except the specific acts the chosen level names, and that the provider's engagement is the documentation — and at Level 2, the holding acts — described in the plan. When a property manager's in-house crew dries a building badly after your crew documented it beautifully, that sentence is the difference between your file being evidence in their dispute and your company being a defendant in it.

The attestation clause defines what your packet claims. A Level 1 record attests to what was observed, where, when, and by what method: these readings, at these locations, on this equipment, at this time. It does not attest that conditions were safe, that the remedy was adequate, that the work of others met any standard, or that anything not observed did not exist. Write the limits into the packet itself, not just the contract — the person reading the file in an appraisal two years from now will never see your contract.

The holding clause is where Level 2 earns its care. The plan must name what holding undertakes — the specific preservation acts — and what it does not: no guarantee that conditions will not deteriorate despite the hold, because some losses deteriorate on their own schedule. It must name the triggers that escalate (new water intrusion, microbial indicators, structural change) and state that escalation is the customer's decision, made on the record the hold is producing. And it must name the expiry: when the hold ends without instruction, the file closes in the held state, and the record says exactly that. The most dangerous document in this business is a hold that silently became a remedy; the clause exists so it cannot.

Evidence integrity runs under all three levels. Originals stay unedited; annotations live on copies. Timestamps and device data stay intact. The chain from capture to delivery is short and nameable. Every adjustment needs a paper trail — and a trail that has been “cleaned up” is worse than a thin one, because it converts your best asset into the other side's best question.

The discipline, stated once: at Level 1 you vouch for a record. At Level 2 you vouch for a record and for named preservation acts, for a named period. At Level 3 you vouch for your own work, documented to the Level 1 standard. If the agreement, the packet, and the invoice all say the same one of those three sentences, the tiers are safe to sell. If they drift apart, no tier is.

The plan is the product — now it has levels

The industry is not going back to a world where every loss becomes a restorer's job. Deductibles, in-house crews, and consolidating claim volume have seen to that. What an operator can still own is the moment of loss itself — the first hours, when the facts exist and the decisions haven't been made. A tiered emergency services plan owns that moment at whatever depth each property justifies: the record alone, the record with a hold, or the record with the full response.

Sell the level the customer can say yes to. Document like it will be read by a stranger in a dispute, because it may be. And let the losses you were never going to win pay you anyway — for the one part of them that was always yours to sell.

Undocumented Water Mitigation Gets Stripped From Estimates

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/undocumented-water-mitigation-gets-stripped-from-estimates/> Published: September 23, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026.

The adjuster didn't cheat you. They did their job — and your estimate lost every line item you couldn't prove.

A shop called Proof AI put it sharper than most in September 2026: “A mitigation job you can't document is line items the adjuster wipes out.” They're building claim-defense automation for trade contractors, and they've named the thing nobody in this trade wants to say out loud. The fight over your invoice isn't won on the job

site. It's won in the file.

For the emergency phase those line items defend, see What Is Water Mitigation? and Emergency Documentation and the Loss Timeline.

Here's how the stripping actually works. The adjuster opens your Xactimate estimate next to their file, and every line item gets the same quiet question: *where's the record?* Not your word. The record. The line items that die first are always the same ones.

Equipment without a placement log. Twenty air movers and three dehus for five days is a big number on paper. Without a daily log showing equipment type, serial or asset number, placement location, and readings taken at each visit, the adjuster has no reason to believe all of it was there all five days. The equipment line shrinks to what the photos show, and photos show a room, not a week.

Antimicrobial without a contamination determination. You sprayed because the water was Category 2 and degrading. But if your arrival notes don't document the category determination — source, observed conditions, time in contact with materials — the antimicrobial line reads as optional. Optional gets deleted.

Monitoring visits without psychrometric data. A daily monitoring charge is a charge for professional judgment exercised on site. Judgment with no readings attached is a drive-by. Temperature, relative humidity, and specific humidity readings, taken daily and trending downward, are what turn a monitoring line from “technician stopped by” into “drying was verified in progress.” No trend, no pay.

Demolition without moisture-map evidence. Flood cuts, pad removal, baseboard detachment — every removal line needs the reason it couldn't be dried in place. The moisture map taken at arrival is that reason: material moisture content above the dry standard, documented per material, per area. Without it, removal looks like a choice. Choices get negotiated down.

Emergency service without FNOL-time documentation. The after-hours premium survives when the file shows the call came in at 9:40 PM and the crew was on site by midnight. It dies when the timeline is reconstructed from memory two weeks later.

None of this is the adjuster being adversarial. Their file has to survive *their* review — a supervisor, a reinspection, sometimes a courtroom. An adjuster can be deposed. “The contractor told me so” is not testimony. A contemporaneous record is.

This is also where the standard has been heading for years, and the 2026 revision of the IICRC S500 made it explicit: documentation is no longer closing paperwork. The moisture map, atmospheric readings, and material moisture-content readings are supposed to form a continuous, timestamped record from first notice of loss through completion. Not a folder of photos assembled at invoice time. A record that starts when the job starts and doesn't stop until the dry standard is met.

So what does the defense file actually look like? It's three layers, in order.

Arrival

Moisture map of every affected area. Photos with timestamps, before anything is moved. Water category and class determination, written down with the reasoning — source identified, contamination assessed, evaporation load classified. Equipment plan: what goes where, and why. This layer answers every question the adjuster will

ask later, and it answers them with the date still on them.

Daily

Atmospheric readings and material moisture readings, every visit, same points where possible so the trend is visible. Equipment check — everything still running, placement adjusted as the drying front moves, adjustments noted. Notes on anything unusual. This layer is what protects the equipment and monitoring lines, because it proves the drying was managed, not just billed.

Completion

Final readings showing materials at or below the dry standard. Final photos. The record closes when the job closes, not when the invoice goes out.

The economics are not close. Documentation costs a technician minutes per visit — a meter, a phone, a consistent habit. A stripped estimate costs thousands per job, and it costs them quietly: most contractors never learn which lines died or why. They just learn that “insurance work doesn’t pay.” It pays fine. It pays what the file proves.

There’s a larger current running under this, worth naming. The whole economy around AI agents is converging on verifiable evidence — open standards now exist for proving what an automated system did, because nobody accepts the operator’s word anymore. Restoration got there first by necessity: your drying log was the original tamper-evident record. The contractors who already document like the file is the product are about to find the rest of the world catching up to their habit.

Documentation is the argument. The work is the work. But the record is what gets paid — and the record is the part you control completely, starting on the next job.

Restoration Intel is an operator publication for the restoration trade. Informational only — not legal or coverage advice. When a claim is disputed, the policy language and the documented facts decide it.

S320 Public Review Is Open. Contents SOP Is About to Get a Book.

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/s320-public-review-contents-sop-book/> Published: September 17, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026.

The argument on the job this month is not “do we pack out.” It is what the file will have to prove once S320 is an American National Standard.

On September 11, 2026, the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC) opened public review for BSR/IICRC S320, Standard for Professional Assessment, Cleaning and Restoration of Contents. The window closes October 26, 2026 — more than 45 days. Consensus Body Chair Laurence Wymant and Vice-Chair John Pletcher lead the body. The draft is on the official IICRC S320 page at iicrc.org/s320; the same review dates appear on iicrc.org under Standards. The standard is in development and is not for purchase on the Standards Webstore.

Comment by October 26 or live under a book written by about 15 people on a consensus body. Inventory, chain of custody, salvage versus dispose, pack-out photos, and contents SLAs will get a citation handle. TPAs will quote it before your estimator does.

What S320 is — and what it is not

Per IICRC, S320 covers principles, methods, and processes to assess, inventory, pack-out, clean, restore, and enhance the appearance of contents. Contents means materials, furniture, fixtures, and equipment inside a building envelope — sometimes called personal property. BSR is the ANSI Board of Standards Review designation; new standards stay BSR/IICRC until ANSI approval.

Do not confuse the stack. S500 remains the water-damage restoration standard; its contents language is a chapter inside a water job, not a standalone contents book. ANSI/IICRC S700 is already published for professional fire and smoke damage restoration of the structure. BSR/IICRC S740, Restoration of Fire and Smoke Damaged Personal Items, is still in development — the fire/smoke contents cousin, not a substitute for S320's broader contents scope. This article does not invent clause numbers from a draft you have not read. The draft lives on the IICRC S320 page for comment. Silence in public review is treated as acceptance of what is written.

Job-site fights this standard will name

Day one: do you inventory on site, or “list it at the warehouse”? Once a national standard exists, the file that starts with a photo of a taped box and no room-by-room list is the weak file. TPAs and carrier auditors will have a published method language to point at.

Category 3 porous: dispose versus “the homeowner wants it cleaned.” That fight already burns hours. A contents standard will not invent Category 3 — S500 already did — but it will give pack-out and cleaning decisions a separate citation path when someone second-guesses salvage.

Electronics, photos, and documents: high emotion, high claim value, easy to lose track of. Chain of custody matters more when a third-party contents vendor is on the ticket and your company still owns the customer relationship. Who signed the inventory? Who held the key to the vault? Who can prove the camera never left the sealed tote?

ALE clock versus pack-out delay: every day contents sit in a wet structure pushes additional living expense and mold risk. The estimator who priced pack-out for “tomorrow” (insured claim cooperation) and the PM who could not get a truck until Thursday already know this. A standard that spells methods for assessment and pack-out makes that delay easier to score against industry practice — for or against you.

Estimator: line items that will need a method note

Once a book exists, these lines stop being vibe and start needing a method note in the file:

- Inventory hours — on-site room-by-room versus warehouse receipt listing.
- Pack-out labor — crew size, stages, and why the day count moved.
- Warehouse days — storage start/stop tied to signed inventory, not a verbal “we’ll figure it out.”
- Cleaning method by material — porous, semi-porous, non-porous; electronics and media called out separately when scoped.
- Salvage versus dispose decisions — photo before disposal, reason code, who authorized.

You do not need invented unit prices from this article. You need the habit: every contents dollar on the estimate maps to a method you can defend — and to mobilization language in the deposit playbook when someone

opens S320 after ANSI stamps it.

PM: photo protocol before the box is taped

Photo protocol before tape hits the box — the same day-one chain as emergency documentation timelines. Room context, then item or tote label, then sealed state. Signed inventory — homeowner or authorized party, date, page count. Who owns the key to the contents vault, and is that name on the job folder? If a vendor runs pack-out, your PM still owns the customer file; the vendor's sheet is not a substitute for your chain of custody.

Assign one PM this week to read the pack-out and inventory sections of the public-review draft. Not the whole book in one sitting — those two sections. Bring three open jobs to the read and mark where your current photos and lists would fail a cold audit.

Shop owner: measure the vendor before ANSI does

If you do not run contents in-house, the vendor's SOP is about to be measured against a national standard. Put that in the subcontract now — inventory format, photo requirements, chain-of-custody handoff, SLA clocks for pack-out and return — not after ANSI stamps S320 and a TPA starts quoting chapter language you never read.

Fifteen people on a consensus body will not know your shop. They will publish methods. Your subcontract either already matches the direction of that draft or it becomes a negotiation after the first denied contents line.

Action before October 26, 2026

- Download the draft from <https://iicrc.org/s320/> (status: in development; not for purchase).
- Confirm the same Public Review window — September 11 through October 26, 2026 — on <https://iicrc.org/category/standards/>.
- Submit comments on the IICRC form before the deadline. Silence is acceptance.
- Assign one PM to read pack-out and inventory sections this week and bring findings to the Monday ops huddle.
- If you use a contents vendor, open the subcontract and add the inventory, photo, and SLA language you will want when S320 is an American National Standard.

Related stack for context only: S700 is already published for structural fire and smoke; S740 remains in development for fire/smoke damaged personal items. S320 is the broader contents assessment, cleaning, and restoration book under public review right now.

Sources: IICRC official S320 page (BSR/IICRC S320 Standard for Professional Assessment, Cleaning and Restoration of Contents; Public Review September 11 – October 26, 2026; Consensus Body Chair Laurence Wymant; Vice-Chair John Pletcher); IICRC Standards category listing the same window (retrieved September 17, 2026).

Don't Pay for Missed Calls: The Oct 1 LSA Playbook

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/dont-pay-for-missed-calls-oct-1-lsa-playbook/> Published: September 13, 2026

Direct answer. Since October 1, 2026, Google Local Services Ads can bill a missed call during listed business hours when the caller waits more than 20 seconds — even if nobody answers. Cover every open hour, shorten phone menus, and track follow-ups so a callback does not become a second lead.

Updated October 6, 2026.

What changes October 1, 2026

Google is changing what counts as a billable lead in Local Services Ads. Starting October 1, a missed call during your listed business hours becomes a charged lead if the caller stays on the line more than 20 seconds — about five rings. Nobody has to answer. Nobody has to talk. The caller waits, hangs up, and you still pay. (Search Engine Land; Search Engine Roundtable, via Google's advertiser email)

Two more pieces that matter:

- **Follow-up calls can also be charged.** If the first call doesn't qualify, a later call between you and that customer that meets Google's valid-lead criteria can become the billable one. Google's Ads Liaison clarified you'll only be charged once for follow-ups within 15 days of the first interaction — after 15 days, it can count as a brand-new lead. (Search Engine Roundtable)
- **There's a routing exception.** If your setup makes callers press a key to reach a department, the 20-second clock starts when they press it. No key press, no charge. Google also says it's adding robocall and spam safeguards, but hasn't said how they work. (Search Engine Land)

Google's stated reason: LSA customers usually need help right now and expect to reach someone fast — the change rewards "excellent responsiveness." (Search Engine Land) Google notified advertisers by email in late August. (Mediagistic)

The part that stings: answer rate already affects where your LSA ad ranks. Miss calls and you drop in the rankings — and starting October 1, you pay for the missed ones on the way down. (AdStack)

The call-handling setup

The goal is simple: no LSA call rings past 20 seconds unanswered during your business hours — the same responsiveness discipline as winning storm work without a franchise call center.

- **Know your number.** Pull your LSA call log (and compare phrasing to words customers actually type) and count how many calls rang out unanswered last month. That's your exposure starting October 1.
- **Cover the phones during every hour you list as open.** Google treats your listed hours as fair game. Either staff them or shrink them to hours you can actually cover.
- **Give every call somewhere to land in under 20 seconds.** A human, a backup person, or a service that answers — not voicemail alone. A missed-call text-back (see also why the phones are the bottleneck) ("sorry we missed you — what's going on?") catches the caller before they dial the next company.
- **Check your phone menu.** If callers press a key to route, the clock starts at the key press — keep the menu short and make sure routing actually reaches a live person.
- **Watch the follow-ups.** A callback you place can become the billable event. Track which LSA callers you've already contacted so the same person doesn't turn into a second charge outside the 15-day window.

This-week checklist

- Pull last month's LSA calls — count the unanswered ones
- Confirm your listed business hours match hours a human actually answers
- Put a backup on the phones for your busiest hours — second staffer, answering service, or AI reception
- Set up missed-call text-back so no caller waits in silence
- Test your phone menu: key press to a live person, fast
- Assign someone to review the LSA lead bill weekly (in effect since October 1, 2026)

Sources: *Search Engine Land* (Anu Adegbola); *Search Engine Roundtable* (Google's advertiser email; *Google Ads Liaison clarification*, Aug 26, 2026); *Mediagistic* (Sep 10, 2026); *AdStack* (Aug 25, 2026).

The Hands Were Always the Bottleneck

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/the-hands-were-always-the-bottleneck-3/> Published: September 8, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026.

Series: *The Hands Were Always the Bottleneck* — Part 3 of 3. Part 1 · Part 2.

Direct answer. Hands-free voice capture keeps documentation parallel to mitigation — consistency improves, carriers see defensible files, and techs finish paperwork while the job is still in progress.

In restoration, the hands have always been the bottleneck. A technician can assess a loss in minutes, but documenting it takes hours of typing, tapping, and thumbing through forms while standing in a flooded hallway or a smoke-filled kitchen. The work itself is physical. The paperwork is not. And for years, the gap between the two has been where time, accuracy, and money quietly leak out of every job.

That gap is finally closing. Voice AI is shifting field documentation from typing-while-wet to talking-while-working, and the implications reach far beyond a single app or a single crew.

The shift is simple to describe and hard to overstate. Instead of stopping to type a note, a tech narrates what they see while they walk the loss. Instead of fumbling with a keyboard in gloves, they speak. The AI listens, structures the information, and files it where it belongs. The hands stay on the job. The documentation happens in parallel, not after the fact.

Field documentation is moving from keyboards to voice. The hands stay on the work.

This is not a new idea in theory. Voice notes and dictation have existed for years. What is new is that the tools are finally good enough, and purpose-built enough, to handle the specific language and workflow of restoration. Moisture readings, category of water, affected materials, drying plans, contents inventories. The vocabulary is specialized, and generic speech-to-text has always stumbled on it. Purpose-built systems understand the context, so the output is usable, not just transcribed.

Encircle has been moving in this direction for a while. Their video summarization feature already lets techs narrate a room walkthrough and get back a structured summary. Their Scope tool turns field data into an IICRC-aligned mitigation plan. The pieces are there. What voice AI adds is the layer that makes the whole thing hands-free from the first step. You talk, the system captures, and the structured record builds itself as you work.

The benefit is not just speed. It is consistency. When every tech documents the same way, in real time, the quality of the record stops depending on who happened to be on the job. Carriers see clearer, more defensible documentation. Adjusters push back less. The office stops chasing missing details. And the tech gets home sooner because the paperwork is already done.

Voice AI turns a phone call into structured documentation. No typing required.

There is also a standards angle that matters. IICRC S500 and related standards define what good documentation looks like, but they do not train the tools that produce it. The standards live in the workflow, not in the software. Voice AI that is aligned to those standards, whether through a purpose-built platform or a licensed skill layered on top of a general voice engine, can enforce the right structure without requiring every tech to memorize it. The standard becomes the default, not the exception.

And then there is the escalation path. Not every question has a clean answer in a manual. When a tech hits something unusual, a complex drying scenario, a contents question, a judgment call, they should be able to tap through to a human specialist without leaving the conversation. The voice layer becomes the front door. The AI handles the routine. The human handles the edge cases. The system knows when to hand off.

This is where the broader pattern shows up. The same shift is happening in knowledge management. Teams are moving away from scattered files and toward living repositories where information is captured as it happens, not filed later. Whether that repository lives in a dedicated platform or a shared drive matters less than the principle: capture at the point of work, in the natural medium of the work. For a restoration tech, that medium is speech. For an office team, it might be a quick note or a photo. The system should meet the person where they are, not force them into a form.

The macro picture is this. Restoration has always been a hands-on trade. The documentation has always been a hands-off tax on that trade. Voice AI removes the tax. It lets the tech stay in the work, keeps the record accurate and timely, and gives the whole operation a cleaner, more defensible trail from first walkthrough to final report.

The hands were always the bottleneck. Now they can finally be the focus.

Related: The record that leaves with the crew · AI will not fix a broken process.

IICRC Cat 3 Contents Pack-Out Protocol

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/iicrc-cat-3-contents-pack-out-cleaning-protocol/> Published: August 22, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026. By Will Tygart. Field and claims file for sewage, overland flood, and other grossly contaminated water. Not a fire pack-out reprint. Not legal advice.

Direct answer. Category 3 contents leave only after PPE, containment, inventory with condition codes, photos, and chain-of-custody that treats the load as potentially infectious — contamination control before cleaning.

Category 3 contents leave the structure only after PPE and contamination controls are up, a room-by-room inventory with condition codes, photos in place, and a chain-of-custody that treats the load as potentially infectious — not as a moving job.

The live fire contents pack-out is a sibling. Do not stretch it to Cat 3. Cat 3 is contamination control first, cleaning second. Category language: S500 categories and classes plus the 2026 weather position (wind-driven

rain is not automatically Cat 3).

When pack-out is indicated on Cat 3

- Porous contents in the water line that cannot be cleaned in place without spreading contamination
- Occupied housing where ALE depends on removing the reservoir
- Reconstruction / demo that would destroy the inventory trail
- Specialty items that need a controlled facility *after* decontamination decisions

Do **not** pack-out unsavable porous goods “to clean later” as a storage play. That is a second contaminated site.

Sequence (S500-aligned)

- Preliminary determination of category is already in the file. If disputed, stop and write why you are treating as Cat 3.
- Containment / path: dirty to decon to clean. No dirty boxes through the living room.
- PPE: gloves, eye, boot covers, N95 or better; splash protection where aerosol is likely. This is not fire-soot PPE.
- In-place photos, then inventory: salvageable hard goods / questionable / non-salvageable porous. Occupant sign-off on non-salvage **before** dumpsters move.
- Pack salvageable items in labeled, closed containers. Do not reuse dirty cartons as “clean return” boxes.
- Transport as contaminated cargo per the company’s infectious-materials SOP and local waste rules.
- Facility: hard goods — clean, then inspect. Soft goods in sewage: default **non-salvageable** unless a documented textile protocol and occupant/carrier agreement say otherwise. Do not run Cat 3 textiles through the same line as a kitchen fire without a written decon break.
- Pack-back only into a dried, cleaned structure. Chain of custody closes on signature.

Item class	Typical Cat 3 call	File note the carrier will ask for
Mattress, carpet pad, stuffed toys, untreated upholstery	Dispose	Photo in place + contamination contact
Clothing / linens in the water line	Dispose unless a documented textile protocol is authorized	Written authorization; do not “try the washer”
Hard plastics, sealed metal tools, some ceramics	Clean if not damaged	Chemistry, dwell, rinse, dry log
Electronics	Usually replace; do not energize	Why restoration is not attempted
Documents / photos	Specialty freeze-dry / vendor — only if authorized	Chain of custody to the vendor

If mold is amplifying, add S520 — do not pretend Cat 3 water is only a drying job. Clocks for TPA contents assignments: contents cleaning SLAs by category.

Wind-Driven Rain Is Not Automatically Category 3

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/iicrc-s500-weather-category-position-2026/> Published: August 15, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026.

Direct answer. Wind-driven rain is not automatically Category 3 under the IICRC S500 2026 position statement — inspect, gather facts, then write the preliminary category determination; weather alone does not make water grossly contaminated.

Full category/class tables and the 2026 position-statement if/then live on Water Damage Categories and Classes. This post is the headline; that guide is the field file.

Wind-driven rain is not automatically Category 3. The IICRC S500 Consensus Body put that in writing on February 10, 2026, and IICRC posted the position statement in April. If your estimator still writes “storm = Cat 3” before anyone walks the job, they are ahead of the standard, not behind it.

What the Consensus Body actually said

The 2021 S500 definition of Category 3 lists examples that *can* include contaminated water entering from wind-driven rain in a hurricane or other weather event. The word that matters is **can**.

In S500, *can* means a possibility open to the restorer. It is not the accepted standard of care. The example is grossly contaminated water, not the weather that delivered it. Clean rain that came in through a failed flashing is not sewage because a storm named it.

Read the statement yourself: Category of Water Damage and Weather-Related Events (PDF). Citations are to the 5th edition (2021). A new Consensus Body has started the next S500 revision. This position is about the book you already own.

Inspect, then determine

S500 still wants a preliminary determination — the restorer’s call on category so you can set a scope. That call comes after information gathering: source, time, contaminants, building history, materials, occupants. Assumptions on the drive over can change at the door.

If the water is Category 1, you can proceed without contamination controls. Category 2 or 3 needs controls and PPE before you dry. Time and temperature can move a category. So can what the water touched after it entered.

An indoor environmental professional is not automatic on every weather job. The statement walks the elevated-risk cases: high-risk occupants, public or care facilities, suspected contaminants, aerosolized material. Use an IEP when the inspection says you need one. Do not rent one because the radar looked ugly.

What to do on the next storm

- Do not pre-print Cat 3 on the work order from the weather radio.
- Walk the job. Photograph the source, the path, and anything that would make the water grossly contaminated.
- Write the preliminary determination in the file, with the facts that got you there.
- If an adjuster says “IICRC says all storm water is Cat 3,” send them the February 10 position statement. It says the opposite.

Shops that keep people treat this as a weekly habit, not a binder they open after a denial — the same point Jon Isaacson keeps making on DYOJO. The walk-through is the job.

Source: ANSI/IICRC S500 Consensus Body, Position Statement: Category of Water Damage and Weather-Related Events (dated February 10, 2026; posted on iicrc.org/s500). This article paraphrases the position. It is not IICRC-endorsed and does not replace the standard.

Related: IICRC S500 categories and classes guide · IICRC standards evolution · IICRC Cat 3 contents pack-out protocol.

The Restoration Carbon Protocol: How RCP Answers the ESG Compliance Pressure Restoration Contractors Are Already Facing

Source: <https://restorationintel.com/restoration-carbon-protocol-rcp-esg-scope-3-compliance/> Published: April 11, 2026

Updated October 6, 2026.

Restoration contractors in 2026 are already navigating simultaneous regulatory pressure from IICRC standard updates, state licensing requirements, and insurance carrier compliance mandates. The next track is now active: commercial property manager ESG requirements that reach directly into the contractor supply chain.

California SB 253 requires companies with over \$1 billion in annual revenue doing business in California to disclose Scope 3 emissions from their supply chains starting in 2027. GRESB now scores GHG data coverage as a distinct performance metric. SBTi-committed property owners are required to set supplier engagement targets covering at least 67% of their Scope 3 emissions. Every one of these frameworks creates demand for per-job carbon data from restoration contractors.

The compliance question for restoration contractors is not whether to produce this data. It is whether to produce it using a standardized, auditable methodology — or produce ad hoc estimates that will not survive a property manager's ESG audit.

What the Restoration Carbon Protocol Is

The Restoration Carbon Protocol (RCP) v1.0 is a free, open-source industry standard for calculating, documenting, and reporting Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions from restoration contractor work. Published at tygartmedia.com/rcp under CC BY 4.0 open license.

The framework covers all five major restoration job types — water damage, fire and smoke, mold remediation, asbestos and hazmat abatement, and biohazard cleanup. For each job type it provides specific emission factors sourced from EPA 2025, EPA eGRID 2023, EPA WARM v16, and DEFRA 2024; a 12-point data capture standard mapping to existing job management system fields in Encircle, PSA, Dash, and Xcelerate; a validated JSON schema (RCP-JCR-1.0) for producing machine-readable Job Carbon Reports; proxy estimation methodology; and audit readiness documentation aligned with GHG Protocol verification standards.

The Four Regulatory Frameworks It Addresses

GRESB: The GH1 indicator now scores contractor data coverage. An RCP Job Carbon Report provides the primary data input that improves a property manager's GRESB data coverage score — replacing spend-based estimates that GRESB scores lower.

SBTi: Science Based Targets initiative commitments require supplier engagement targets covering 67% of Scope 3 emissions. RCP-certified contractors provide the primary-data-quality records that satisfy SBTi supplier engagement documentation requirements.

California SB 253: Scope 3 reporting begins in 2027 for covered companies. Restoration contractors who deliver RCP Job Carbon Reports are providing the Category 1 supply chain data their clients need — delivered in a format that survives limited assurance verification beginning in 2030.

CSRD: EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive requirements affect US contractors serving EU-exposed clients. ESRS E1 explicitly requires primary data quality disclosure for Scope 3 supply chain emissions. RCP's data_quality section satisfies this requirement.

The Competitive Pressure Is Already Here

Property managers with institutional investor backing are beginning to add Scope 3 vendor data requirements to preferred contractor agreements — not as a future condition, but as a current qualification. The contractor who can respond to a supplier sustainability questionnaire with two years of RCP portfolio data and a documented emissions methodology is in a materially different vendor qualification position than the contractor who provides an estimate or declines to respond.

The RCP framework, its technical guides, and its public API are available at tygartmedia.com/rcp. The certification roadmap and v1.1 governance structure are in active development — restoration industry organizations are invited to contact rcp@tygartmedia.com to participate in the governance process.

Also in this cluster: the same protocol for healthcare facilities on Healthcare Facility Hub, for continuity planners on Continuity Hub, for carriers on Risk Coverage Hub, and the property-manager guide on BC ESG.

Related: Sustainable restoration practices A · Physical climate risk and restoration strategy A · BCESG RCP hub.