



Subsidence in 2026: early signs of a significant surge

The exceptionally hot and dry conditions experienced across the UK this summer are already translating into a significant increase in subsidence claims. While it remains relatively early in the claims cycle, both the volume of new losses and, perhaps more importantly, the severity of damage being reported suggest 2026 could prove a particularly challenging year for insurers.

July was the driest on record for England and summer 2026 is being suggested to have been the warmest on record, leaving shrinkable clay soils heavily depleted of moisture. Against this backdrop, McLarens has seen subsidence instructions rise sharply, with activity particularly concentrated across London, the South East and East Anglia, alongside emerging clusters in the Midlands and South West.

Earlier and more severe

flood or storm, where claims typically arrive immediately after an event, subsidence notifications emerge over a longer period as movement develops and damage becomes apparent.

This makes the early indications particularly noteworthy. McLarens recorded 30% more subsidence instructions in July 2026 than in July 2025 - itself a surge year - and in August, that year-on-year increase jumped to over 250%. Part of this growth reflects the expansion of our subsidence team, launched in April 2025, so the figures shouldn't be

read as a precise measure of the scale of subsidence activity. Still, they align with the trend we're seeing anecdotally.

For example, damage also appears unusually severe in some cases. Cracking of up to 5mm is relatively common in subsidence claims, but McLarens adjusters are currently encountering properties with cracks of 30mm, 40mm and even 50mm. Under the BRE Digest 251 classification widely used by the industry, crack widths greater than 25mm fall within Category 5, where structural intervention may be required.

Some properties have required structural propping and residents to move into alternative accommodation. This creates additional cost and disruption, while potentially changing how the claim needs to be managed.

The importance of early decisions

These more severe cases illustrate why specialist intervention matters.

Tree-related clay shrinkage is a common cause of subsidence. Ordinarily, the claims process may involve site investigations, monitoring and arboricultural evidence before determining whether vegetation should be reduced or removed. That evidence-led process remains important: the cause of movement must be established before expensive remedial decisions are made.

However, where a building is severely damaged or occupants have been displaced, insurers may not have the luxury of waiting for a full cycle of monitoring. Keeping a policyholder in alternative accommodation for many months while evidence is gathered can itself generate substantial costs, whilst also being significantly disruptive to the resident.

Claims therefore need to be considered individually. In some circumstances, progressing stabilisation or repairs earlier may be the appropriate course, even where this means accepting that opportunities for recovery against a third party could be reduced. The objective is to balance technical investigation and potential recovery with the cost of delay and the needs of the policyholder.

Avoiding a one-size-fits-all response

The same principle applies to remediation. Underpinning has traditionally been a common response to serious subsidence, but it is not automatically the best solution. McLarens has encountered properties underpinned during the 1970s and 1980s that are experiencing renewed movement because root activity and moisture extraction have continued.

There are also sustainability considerations. Underpinning requires significant excavation and concrete, while alternatives can include piling, root barriers and managed vegetation reduction. The appropriate response will depend on the building, cause of movement, surrounding vegetation and prospects for future stability.

The priority should therefore be achieving a resilient long-term outcome rather than defaulting to a particular repair methodology.

Preparing for the surge

The developing situation also raises questions about how the insurance market manages subsidence risk more broadly. Mature trees, shrinkable clay soils and dense development can combine to create readily identifiable exposures. Better use of property, soil and vegetation data could enable more sophisticated risk assessment and help policyholders understand practical mitigation measures before damage occurs.

There is also a resourcing challenge. Subsidence is a specialist discipline and the pool of experienced adjusters, surveyors and engineers is finite. A substantial surge places pressure on that expertise just as demand is greatest.

The scale of the 2026 event will not be clear for some time. What is already apparent, however, is that claims have arrived earlier and significant damage is being encountered. The priority for insurers should not simply be processing additional volume, but ensuring claims receive the right technical expertise from the outset.

With subsidence, early investigation, accurate diagnosis and proportionate intervention can make the difference between a controlled claim and one characterised by delays, unnecessary costs and further damage. In a potentially significant surge year, those fundamentals matter more than ever.

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