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SNOWMOBILE SAFETY AND INSURANCE TIPS

For some, when the fun of making snowmen and having snowball fights wears thin, they turn to more adventurous winter activities, like snowmobiling.

Snowmobiles, like any motorized vehicle, have their dangers. We've put together some safety tips for when you hit the snow-covered wilderness.

- Never drive your snowmobile alone or in unfamiliar areas. Have someone ride along with you, so you can help each other in case of a breakdown or accident.
- Avoid waterways. Frozen lakes and rivers can be fatal.
- Avoid snowmobiling in bad weather. Check warnings for snow, ice and wind chill conditions before you go out.
- Watch the path ahead to avoid rocks, trees, fences, ditches and other obstructions.
- Don't hurdle snow banks.
- Never drink while driving or riding a snowmobile. As with cars, drinking and driving a snowmobile can be deadly.
- Be sure the snowmobile is maintained properly and is in good operating condition. There have been reports stating that the throttle may stick, leading the

driver to lose control of the sled. Snowmobiles manufactured before 1983 may not have a throttle-interruption device designed to shut

off the snowmobile if the throttle sticks.

- Use extra caution if driving at night—unseen obstacles could be disastrous. Do not drive faster than your headlights will allow you to see.

PROOF OF LIABILITY INSURANCE FOR \$15,000, \$30,000 AND \$5,000 IS REQUIRED WHEN REGISTERING OR OPERATING A SNOWMOBILE IN NEW JERSEY.

For real peace of mind as you travel off the beaten path, you need an insurance policy that provides a wide range of coverages. Review your homeowners policy to see if your snowmobile is covered under your policy. Because of coverage restrictions, you might need to consider a separate policy.

When looking for a policy, you'll want to consider coverage such as liability (for claims brought against you for bodily injury or property damage); medical payments (for any necessary medical treatment); collision; and coverage for other perils such as fire, theft and vandalism.

Will your current insurance cover you? Does the required insurance go far enough? Before you break out the sled this winter, give us a call—we'll make sure the coverage you get is the coverage you need.

ICE DAMS

Ice dams are the bane of every Northeast homeowner's existence. These silent, passive-aggressive ice build-ups pool water under your roofing material, causing leaks and rot that you might not find until the damage is wide spread.

The ice dam's calling card is a sparkling display of icicles along a roof's eaves. They're beautiful as they hang there, catching the winter light. But don't let this cold beauty distract you from the true message of these formations. Despite what our popular culture would have us believe, pretty does not equal good.

All houses leak heat. It seeps out windows, doors, poorly insulated walls—and through our roofs. Even the best insulated roof will throw off some heat. But if a roof leaks too much heat, it will melt snow that lands on it. The runoff flows down the roof, until it gets to the overhanging eaves, which have no heat source underneath to keep the

melt unfrozen. Then it refreezes. Over time, as this process happens again and again, the ice dam forms. And, as it gets bigger, it begins to collect a pool of water, which works its way up under the roofing material. Once under a roof's protective skin, standing water can cause rot, and find its way into your house through nail holes or seams between plywood sheets. Of course, this will result in more rot and even insulation failure and will only accelerate the formation of ice dams.

The best time to stop ice dams is before they start. Here in the northeastern United States, homeowners should install insulation with an r-factor of at least R-38 (about 12 inches of fiberglass or cellulose). But keeping heat in the house is only one part of the solution; whisking any hot air that does escape away from the roof as soon as possible is the second. That's why many contractors recommend a companion ventilation system.

We're offering this information because we value your business, and we don't want you to wake up some day this winter to a ceiling leak that turns out to be a whole lot more. But we're not experienced contractors, and you should contact a qualified roofing expert before beginning any work.





AS INDEPENDENT AGENTS, WE CAN HELP—A LOT!

Most people don't spend their spare time thinking about insurance. And, we know that insurance can be confusing at best. It should come as no surprise that buying insurance remains a tedious and complex endeavor.

Fortunately, that's where we come in. As independent agents, we help people make the right insurance decisions for their individual circumstances.

There are dozens of choices when it comes to buying insurance. Because we represent numerous companies, we're in a position to analyze your choices in a complete and professional manner. We can help you to select from among the best alternatives for you—logical and time-tested options for you to choose from.

We work hard to make sure we are on top of our game. But what we're really about is getting you the best coverage for your specific needs at the right price. Call us today for a review of your policy needs.



UNDERINSURED? HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Did you know more than 80 percent of working Americans don't have adequate disability insurance? We're all looking for ways to save money. However, skimping on your disability insurance should not be an option. It's hard to imagine being disabled by illness or injury. But, consider this: One in three Americans will suffer a disability that keeps them from work for at least 90 days before they reach age 65. And, the average length of disability absence is two years.

You can reduce the cost of your disability insurance premiums by choosing a longer waiting period before your benefits begin or by electing a shorter benefit period.

If you have enough resources to cover all of your expenses during the first three months of a disability, choosing a longer waiting period may be worth considering. Your premiums will probably be lower for coverage that starts after you've been disabled for three months.

In many cases, choosing a policy with a shorter benefit period can also reduce your premiums. A warning though—choosing a benefit to reduce your premiums, ending before your normal retirement age, could be a bad move. The longer the disability, the more likely that it will pose financial hardship.

Disability coverage is essential to protect your family. If you have any questions on the amount of coverage you have or if you're considering changes to your disability policy, call us. We will help you determine the right amount of coverage for your needs.

FOR THE UNSUSPECTING...

Insurance fraud is a costly crime with millions of victims. This crime may seem minor, but insurance fraud costs approximately \$30 billion a year. Who pays for this crime? We all do, as policyholders. These crimes increase premiums for auto, home and health insurance.

Fraud exists in all areas. Estimates put the cost of **auto insurance fraud** alone in the billions each year. Fraud includes motorists receiving treatment for fake injuries; doctors or medical facilities billing for treatments that were never received; and drivers staging car accidents with the sole purpose of cheating their insurance company.

Health insurance fraud is estimated to be approximately 10 percent of the annual cost for health care in the United States. Health insurance fraud includes patients, doctors or medical facilities submitting false claims for services that were not provided or received.

Medicaid fraud costs taxpayers millions of dollars annually. Medicaid fraud includes patients, doctors or facilities participating in schemes to offer or receive kickbacks for providing items or services not billable by Medicaid; overbilling Medicaid for services and receiving surplus benefits.

According to the Coalition Against Insurance **Fraud, workers' compensation and disability fraud** accounts for an estimated \$2.1 billion of the total fraud problem. Disability fraud includes employees receiving benefits from an employer when they are not disabled and still can perform the functions of their job.

These are only a few examples of different types of insurance fraud. Buying or selling fake automobile insurance identification cards; collecting illegal unemployment insurance benefits; having phony credentials or documents; and many more types of fraud all put a serious drain on the wallets of every employer, employee and insurance consumer.

If you know or suspect someone is committing insurance fraud, your report can help make these people pay with fines, loss of license and/or jail time. Logon to www.njinsurancefraud.org/report.htm to report suspected insurance fraud.

NEW LAW ALLOWS HOMEOWNERS WITH NONLEAKING OIL TANKS TO OBTAIN UST FUNDING FOR TANK REMOVAL

Thanks to a new law effective Aug. 4, 2006, homeowners now are able to obtain loans and grants to help finance the costs for the closure and replacement of their nonleaking underground storage tanks from the Petroleum Underground Storage Tank Remediation, Upgrade and Closure Program. Prior to the passage of this law, the program was available only to homeowners with a leaking tank.

Funding assistance currently is available through the New Jersey Economic Development Authority. Grants and loans of up to \$1,200 may be awarded for the closure of nonleaking underground home heating oil tanks. If the tank also is replaced, grants and loans of up to \$3,000 may be awarded. Tanks should be replaced with an above-ground storage tank whenever possible.

Homeowner applicants may qualify for a conditional hardship grant if:

1. their taxable income is less than \$250,000;
2. their personal net worth, exclusive of their primary residence and pension (401(k), IRAs), is less than \$500,000; and

3. the EDA makes a determination of financial hardship, which is based on whether an applicant can reasonably be expected to repay if the funding were to be awarded as a loan. (A grant worksheet is provided by the EDA to help applicants determine whether they qualify for financial hardship.)

Homeowners must use a contractor certified by the New Jersey Department for Environmental Protection for UST closures and/or replacements. (If a UST is being replaced with an above-ground tank, the contractor installing it does not need to be NJDEP certified.) A list of DEP certified UST companies is found on their Web site, www.njeda.com/ust_funding.asp, along with pertinent information and documents, including an application.

Homeowners who wish to apply for assistance should complete the EDA's application and submit it to the EDA. The EDA advises homeowners to submit applications once the work has been completed.

In addition to visiting the EDA's Web site for information and assistance, homeowners can contact the NJEDA Customer Support Administrator at (609) 777-4898.