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INDEX:

DOGS AND YOUR INSURANCE 1
 KEEP THE GREEN FROM YOUR
 GARGE SALE IN YOUR OWN POCKET..... 2
 VACATION HOMES—GET THE
 COVERAGE YOU NEED..... 2
 CARPOOLING:THE LATEST OLD FAD 3
 DO YOU HAVE A HOME INVENTORY?..... 4
 NEWS FROM OUR AGENCY..... 4

DOGS AND YOUR INSURANCE

Many pet owners take advantage of the increasingly pleasant weather. Indeed, the sight of people playing fetch in the park or strolling the neighborhood with their dogs is one of summers leading indicators.

If you own a pet, it may interest you to know that across the region, states have begun introducing and even passing legislation that affects the ability of insurers to underwrite homeowners policies based on the existence of dogs in the insured homes. The New Jersey Legislature recently considered a bill that would prevent an insurer from refusing to renew or issue a homeowners policy solely because of the breed of dog. What this means to an insurance consumer is that this potential new law would change current restrictions on what an insurer may consider when deciding to continue and price your policy. Right now, if you own a specific breed of dog, the insurer can use that to decline to renew your policy, increase the price of a policy or, if there is an incident, refuse to issue you a policy.

At first, this may sound like a gracious move by a dog-friendly government. However, this bill also allows an insurer to require the owner of such a dog to choose between excluding coverage for the dog from the insurance policy or purchasing a separate dog-coverage rider. The rider may not be priced unfairly or discriminatorily, but could be expensive, as the risk insured against may be shown to be likely to reoccur.

Thus, the owner of a dog that has bitten a person or another pet in the past may be faced with choosing to “going bare” and risking that a future incident will not be covered by insurance, exposing the owner to liability expenses. Conversely, the owner may be forced to buy a separate “dog-bite” policy to avoid such liability.

What does this all mean to the average dog owner? While the vast majority of dogs are wonderful companions, it is important to remember that even the most friendly and well-trained dog might react badly to frightening or unusual circumstances. It behooves dog owners to take precautions such as segregating the pet in a different room when having strangers or children over, and securely leashing and remaining vigilant and in control of the dog's behavior when out in public. Doing so minimizes the risk that you'll have to answer hard questions the next time your homeowners policy is up for renewal.



KEEP THE GREEN FROM YOUR GARAGE SALE IN YOUR OWN POCKET

The seasonal weather may have you thinking about having a yard/garage sale.

Great idea. Don't forget to organize your items; label each item with a price tag; hang up signs advertising the date and time; get a cash box together with small change; and check your homeowners or renters insurance policy.

That's right. Most standard homeowners and renters insurance policies provide liability protection, which offers you coverage if someone is injured on your property or causes damage to your property. But, why not give our agency a call to make sure you have all the necessary coverages in place? The last thing you want is to have to pay someone's medical fees when you were just trying to clear a little space in your attic or basement.

To avoid any potential injury, make sure your property is in good shape. Repair anything that might fall on someone or anything someone might trip over and fall. Keep sharp objects out of the reach of children and don't sell anything that you know is unsafe or hazardous. And, keep your pets inside during your sale.

Keep in mind that though a one-time yard sale should be covered under your homeowners or renters insurance policy, if you plan to host frequent yard sales or use a yard sale as a fundraiser for charity, double check with us first. We are here to make sure you are covered.



VACATION HOMES—GET THE COVERAGE YOU NEED

When you insure a home, any home, you secure two types of coverage: property protection, which guards the home itself, surrounding property, structures and contents; and liability protection, which offers coverage against a claim or lawsuit resulting from bodily injury or property damage to others caused by an accident on your property or as a result of your personal activities anywhere.

While a separate policy will be needed to insure property damage to your vacation home, an endorsement on your primary homeowners policy usually is enough to extend liability coverage. However, keep in mind that having a second home increases the value of assets you have at risk.

You'll want to work closely with us to make sure you have adequate coverage. In fact, you may want to consider purchasing extra liability insurance, also known as a personal umbrella policy. A PUP can increase the liability coverage on your home, vacation home or auto in increments of \$1 million or more.

A vacation home doesn't have to be an exclusive, eight-bedroom villa on the shore. A camp cabin or even a permanently parked trailer are considered vacation homes that should be insured.

Whether you use it year-round, all summer, or only on weekends, you want your vacation home to be as well-protected as your primary residence. Also, it would be nice if you didn't go broke trying to insure it. We can help.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is everything. Those sunset views on the beach are lovely, but they also are the source of some particular insurance issues. Insurance underwriters don't consider the subjects of their coverage in a vacuum. It's not just three bedrooms, two baths, 2,500 sq. ft.; it's three bedrooms, two baths, 2,500 sq. ft. on the coast.

For much of the Northeast, it's particularly important to see if you have proper coverage for hurricane or windstorm damage. Many homeowners policies may provide limited coverage on hurricane damage or windstorm protection.

Also, give us a call for information on flood insurance. Homeowners policies do not provide flood coverage and the National Flood Insurance Program, which writes most flood policies, requires a 30-day waiting period before coverage takes effect.

CARPOOLING: THE LATEST OLD FAD

These days most everyone is looking for ways to save money, and suddenly the carpool is back in style. And, why not? By carpooling, you'll save on gas; your vehicle will enjoy less wear and tear; you'll endure less stress on your commute; and, by driving less, you'll be doing the environment a favor.

You may even save on your auto insurance premium.

Since insurance carriers base premiums at least partially on the number of miles you regularly drive your vehicle, a substantial cut in that number via carpooling may be worth some money in your pocket. Give us a call to see if you should be paying less for coverage.

This is one of those rare occasions where the only insurance concern is how much you'll save. Insurance policies vary, so double check with us, but the liability portion of your policy covers passengers, and most policies would not exclude carpool members. In some instances, carpool driving isn't covered by your regular insurance policy as it's considered business use of your car. However, such policies are uncommon, and when you call or stop by our office, odds are we'll be discussing how much you'll be saving.



DO YOU HAVE A HOME INVENTORY?

If your household belongings are lost to fire or theft, your homeowners policy will likely provide you with funds to repurchase those items. However, without an accurate and detailed listing of your valuables, how can you possibly know exactly what you lost?

A home inventory can help. It provides a practical way for you to ensure that everything you own is protected fully from loss. It gives your insurer a record that helps determine the amount of your loss, assures that you receive appropriate reimbursement and can accelerate the claims process.

Creating a home inventory is easy and requires only a few simple steps.

1. **Start writing.** List all of your major belongings and furnishings, room by room. Include items tucked away in drawers and hidden in storage. Don't forget to provide a brief description of any big ticket items, noting details such as purchase price, serial numbers, etc.
2. **Produce records.** Back up your inventory list with receipts or appraisals when possible. Take photographs of your belongings, noting the date and shown contents on each picture. Or, you can videotape each room, describing the contents as you go.

3. **Store it offsite.**

It wouldn't be helpful to keep your inventory in your home—what happens if a fire destroys everything, including your records? Make copies of your list, receipts, photos, etc., and keep them in a safe deposit or with a relative.

4. **Update regularly.** Be sure to update your inventory as you acquire new items, particularly those of high value. Also, it is essential to conduct a new inventory whenever you move into a new home. Keep copies offsite.

Be aware that policies generally limit the amount of coverage on certain possessions (for example: jewelry and silverware) and may not be adequate protection for other possessions (for example: cameras and fine arts)—consider purchasing additional insurance on these items. Give us a call today for more information and the best advice on your personal insurance needs.

NEWS FROM OUR AGENCY

SUPERIOR CLAIMS SERVICE

Life is full of surprises—some good, some bad. Because you don't know what the future holds, it's always best to be prepared. In the event of a loss, you can count on us to be there for you. We work with experienced claims professionals who are ready to speak with you whenever necessary. We pride ourselves on having several markets in which to place your insurance at the most competitive rates.

In addition, we stand ready to follow through on the entire process, making sure everything goes right. We want to partner with you to make sure you never feel alone at a difficult time.

Our agency will help you prepare for those unforeseen events with our insurance policies. Give us a call today for the best rates in auto, home, business, life and health insurance.

