

# Insights & Updates



VIA INSURANCE & FINANCIAL SERVICES

VALVANO INSURANCE AGENCY

16 West Elizabeth Avenue ♦ PO Box 1100 ♦ Linden, NJ 07036  
(908) 862-4047p ♦ (908) 862-0308f

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## National "Do Not Call" registry is open for business

The National "Do Not Call" Registry puts consumers in charge of the telemarketing calls they receive at home. The federal government created this registry to make it easier and more efficient for you to stop getting sales calls you do not want. You can register online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) if you have an e-mail address or you can call toll-free at (888) 382-1222.



The Federal Trade Commission, the Federal Communications Commission and the states will begin enforcing this registry on Oct. 1, 2003. Your registration will be effective for five years. This will stop most, but not all, telemarketing calls.

One thing to be careful of is fraud. If someone calls and claims he or she is from the National "Do Not Call" Registry offering to put your name and number on the list, say no. The FTC will not allow private companies or other parties to register consumers for this list.

The National "Do Not Call" Registry is a free service from the federal government.

## Prevent coverage lapses. It could save you money.

Letting your insurance lapse could require you to get your insurance through the higher-cost Personal Automobile Insurance Plan. Even if the lapse lasts for only a short period and you remain eligible for coverage outside PAIP, many insurance companies will charge higher rates to drivers who have let their coverage expire. Pay close attention to your premium bills and pay them before the due date to avoid a lapse in coverage.



Should your insurance ever lapse, be careful to retain a copy of the cancellation notice. Lacking a copy of your previous insurer's notice could make it difficult or impossible to get coverage, even through PAIP.

Call us about the various coverage and deductible choices available to you. This may also help you save money on your auto policy. But remember, preventing coverage lapses can be the biggest cost-saver of all.

## More deer are crossing



This is bad news for motorists. The deer population is exploding and this means trophies on the wall for some and damaged vehicles to repair for others. Losses due to deer and car encounters will only increase as the deer population continues to grow and urban habitats invade rural environments. Due to the hunting and mating season, deer-auto collisions are more likely to occur in October

through December.

Deer are most active in the early morning and evening hours. Drive with caution when you are traveling through a deer-crossing zone. Look for other deer after one has crossed the road. They seldom travel alone. Slow down and blow your horn with one long blast to frighten the deer away. If necessary, use your high beams to see the deer better. But be forewarned—bright lights tend to immobilize the animal. If that happens, flash your lights on and off in an effort to get the deer off the highway.

If you hit a deer, do not touch it. The frightened animal could hurt you. Get your car off the road, if possible, and call the police. Contact us to report any damage to your car. A collision with a deer or another animal is covered under the comprehensive portion of your auto insurance policy.

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## Young drivers—help them play it safe

As a parent, there is a lot you can do to help make your teen a safer driver. Set time aside to help your teen prepare and practice, and set limits for them.

Encourage awareness of traffic safety by talking to your child about driving etiquette while they're riding with you. Set an example of safe driving practices—wear your seat belt, obey the traffic signs and don't speed.

Set and enforce important rules. Demand no alcohol use. Clearly, drinking and driving are a deadly combination. Unfortunately, the incidence of teenage drinking and driving is increasing. Let your child know if he or she gets into a situation that has made it unsafe to drive or to ride, they can call you for a safe ride home.

Night driving is another serious concern. About half of all fatal motor vehicle crashes involving teens occur after dark. Restrict night driving. Outings late at night tend to be for recreational activities. In this type of circumstance, any teen can be easily distracted.

Make sure your teen knows and understands the importance of using seat belts. Using both lap and shoulder belts reduces the chance of serious injury by at least 50 percent. However, statistics still show that less than 40 percent of teen drivers use their seat belt.

Insurance is another concern for many parents with teen drivers. Auto rates tend to be higher for drivers under age 25. Check with our agency to see if your auto insurance company offers any of the following discounts:

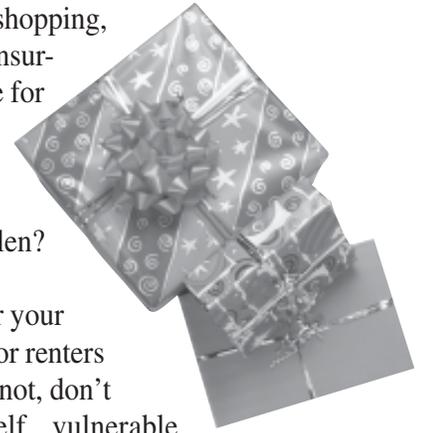
- Driving the family car—Rates are usually higher for young people who drive their own car.
- Good student discounts—For full-time students age 16-25 who are in the top 20 percent of their class, maintain a B average and/or make the honor roll or deans list.
- Driver training courses—Discounts may be available for drivers under 21 who have completed an approved driver-training course.
- Resident student discounts—Families with a young driver who resides at college more than 100 miles away without the custody of a vehicle.

You also may elect to take on a higher deductible for collision coverage to lower your premium. Or if you have an older car, you may wish to eliminate the collision coverage.

Remember, be sure to contact our agency when you are ready to add your teen driver to your auto policy.

## Gift shopping early this year?

If you've gotten a head start on your holiday shopping, do you have insurance coverage for all of these gifts should they be destroyed or stolen? They may be covered under your homeowners or renters policy. But if not, don't leave yourself vulnerable.



There may be limitations on the amount of insurance provided by your homeowners policy, especially for expensive gifts such as personal computers, silverware, stamp or coin collections, fine art and jewelry. There also may be limitations on the causes of loss or damage that are covered, such as breakage, theft or flood.

You can get additional coverage for these gifts with homeowners policy endorsements or a separate floater. The limitations for certain types of property can be increased, or specific items, such as jewelry, can be scheduled at full value with no deductible, based on current appraisal or the bill of sale.

If you rent, your renters insurance limits the types of property covered and their amount, as well as the causes of loss covered. Renters also can purchase floaters and endorsements for these uncovered items.

If the gifts are stolen from your car, your typical auto insurance policy will not cover them. However, subject to a deductible, they may be covered under your homeowners or renters policy. Check with us to be sure.

For the piece of mind that comes with knowing you are adequately covered, give us a call. We will help you determine the right of amount of coverage for your needs.

*Insights*  
& **Updates**

## Looking to buy insurance? See an independent agent.

So, you're thinking of purchasing an insurance policy for your home, life or car—just to name a few. And you have all these questions. What type of policy do you need? Will it cover all your possessions or do you need special coverage too? How much coverage should you buy? To help you through the insurance quagmire, you need to talk to an insurance agent. Now you have two choices. Should you speak with a captive or an independent insurance agent?



What's the difference?

A captive insurance agent is bound to sell you insurance from the one company he/she represents and only that company.

An independent insurance agent has the freedom to shop around with a number of different insurance companies and find the policy that is perfect for your needs. It's even possible to provide you with a number of quotes from each company allowing you to make an informed decision.

Once you've settled on a policy don't think you can forget about it. Your needs are constantly changing. There are huge moments in your life: marriage, buying a home, pregnancy, retirement, etc. Wouldn't you like the option to work with someone who is flexible? Wouldn't you like to purchase insurance from someone who has the capability to personalize your policy to your needs?

That person is an independent insurance agent.

Independent agents have the ability to let you know if you have the right kind of protection; whether you have enough insurance—or too much; if there are gaps in your coverage; or whether you qualify for any discounts.

Other advantages to choosing an independent over a captive agent include:

- receiving objective advice because the agent is not employed by the insurance company;
- the ability to access companies that offer specialized coverages for unique needs;
- working with a highly trained professional who can help you make complex, vital insurance decisions;
- receiving personalized, face-to-face service; and
- working with someone who lives in your community and supports local efforts that will effect you.

Call us today. We can review your policy to make sure you have adequate coverage. We'll show you what you've been missing.



## Home business

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in America. Each year, more than half-a-million businessmen and women launch their own ventures, frequently from a spare room or a converted den. Of course, while small businesses represent 99 percent of employers, employ about half of the private sector workforce and are responsible for up to three-quarters of new jobs, more than half-a-million small businesses fail each year.

Being your own boss is truly a risky business. But some small business owners—particularly those operating from their homes—are making the ventures far more uncertain than necessary.

There's a lot involved in starting a home business: registering a company name, securing permits and licenses, creating office space, procuring office equipment and supplies, etc. While worrying about all this, the majority of home-business owners neglect to purchase the right business coverage. A 1999 study found more than 60 percent of home businesses are not properly insured and more than 70 percent of the underinsured assume their homeowners policies will cover any losses. They are wrong.

In fact, the majority of homeowners policies cover a maximum of \$2,500 for business equipment in the home and a highly inadequate \$250 for off-premises business losses.

Such minimal coverage pales in comparison to the risks involved with owning a business. A few of the insurance policies a business might need to protect itself include: property; inland marine; auto; fidelity; crime; general liability; professional liability; equipment breakdown; employee health, disability, and life insurance; workers' compensation; and business interruption.

Every business is unique, with different risks and different needs. While small office/home office policies are fairly easy to obtain, it can be difficult to know exactly what coverage you need. Make sure you get the right coverage for your home business. Call us before you hang the 'open' sign on your door.

## Help! Somebody stole me

According to government estimates, nearly 500,000 people are the victims of identity theft each year. Identity theft occurs when a person steals someone's personal information in order to further some



illegal activity. Usually, it's done to gain access to money at the expense of the person whose identity is stolen. The three highest categories of identity theft are: credit card fraud at 43 percent; loan or bank fraud at 20 percent; and phone or utility services at 20 percent. Victims can end up suffering enormous debt that

requires time and much expense to clear up.

Some insurance companies are beginning to offer limited coverage for expenses incurred to cure debt and injury to credit caused by identity theft; for example, notary expense, certified mail expense, lost income, loan re-application fees, attorney fees and long-distance phone calls. Please call our agency to check on the current availability of this insurance protection.

Nevertheless, prevention is clearly the best protection. There are things you can do to protect against identity theft. Some of them are:

- Don't give any personal information to someone who has solicited you, whether by e-mail, phone, regular mail or in person, until you verify the legitimacy of the request.
- Be suspicious of missing credit card statements; thieves may have filed an address change in order to take over your account.
- Get a locking mailbox or promptly pick up your mail after delivery.
- Be observant of anyone near you paying too close attention to your use of your credit card, debit card, ATM card or phone card.
- Shred or otherwise destroy all sensitive statements that go out with the trash.
- Once every year, check your credit report.
- Use PINs and passwords that are not easily replicated.

The three major credit reporting agencies:

Equifax; (800) 685-1111; [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com)

Experian; (888) 397-3742; [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com)

TransUnion; (800) 916-8800; [www.transunion.com](http://www.transunion.com)



## Is it safe to volunteer?

Some cautious people want to know if they are vulnerable to lawsuits resulting from their negligence in the performance of duties as a volunteer. Whether it's serving as coach for the soccer team or providing meals to shut-ins, nobody wants to incur the risk of liability without the benefit of income for their services.

The good news is that Congress passed the Volunteer Protection Act, effective Sept. 16, 1997, which relieves many volunteers of personal liability. Under the act, a volunteer of a nonprofit organization or government entity will not be personally liable for harm caused as long as:

- The volunteer was acting within the scope of volunteer responsibilities;
- The volunteer was properly licensed, certified or authorized for the activity that caused the harm (if required or appropriate);
- The harm was not caused by conduct that was criminal, willful or flagrantly indifferent to the rights or safety of the person harmed; and
- The volunteer did not cause the harm while operating a motor vehicle, watercraft or aircraft.

The act defines a "volunteer" as an individual performing services for a nonprofit organization or a government entity, who does not receive compensation. However, the volunteer may accept up to \$500 worth of incidental property each year and may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred while serving as a volunteer.

While not complete immunity against suits, the federal act does give you reasonable protection that will hopefully encourage your involvement in volunteer services. We all depend upon such generous behavior to improve upon the quality of our lives.

## Insurance is a must for renters

Imagine returning home only to discover your apartment building has been gutted by a fire, destroying everything you own. Or try this—you leave a stack of boxes in your apartment and someone falls over them. You are about to be slapped with a major lawsuit.

Renters insurance will cover both of these types of claims. Like homeowners insurance, renters insurance will cover all your personal possessions and protect you from huge legal and medical bills should someone be injured in your apartment or if you injure someone in your nonbusiness activities away from home.

A common misconception is that your landlord's insurance will cover you. This is untrue in almost all situations. Your landlord carries insurance that will cover his/her loss in a situation where the building is damaged in some way.

Another falsehood is that if your roommate has insurance, you don't need it. Your roommate's insurance will cover his/her possessions, but it will not cover yours unless you are listed on the policy.

It's easy to get renters insurance. Call us. As your independent agent, we will shop



around to get you the best coverage tailored for you at the best price.