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## PLANNING AHEAD FOR THE NEXT BIG STORM

Hurricane season runs from June 1 through Nov. 30. Paying attention to current weather reports and preparing for the storm can reduce the chances of injury or major property damage. Remember most homeowners policies don't cover much of the water damage from hurricanes. A flood insurance policy may be needed to cover the water damage, but coverage on new policies typically doesn't become effective until 30 days after application is made.

Don't be caught off guard. Now is the time to plan for the next big storm and think about the possibility of buying additional insurance to protect your home.

Supplies to have on hand include the following: battery-powered radios and flashlights, water, matches, nonperishable food, first-aid supplies, plywood, security fencing, tarps, mops and sandbags.

The following steps should be taken to help protect your home and property should a hurricane strike:

- Cover doors and windows.
- Check for and repair any loose roof shingles or tiles.
- Install shutter coverings.
- Anchor or remove unsecured outside objects.
- Secure roof trusses.
- Make arrangements for pets.

### What to do after a hurricane

Services such as power and water may be out for a while. Grocery stores and banks may be closed. What can you do in the aftermath?

- Check on neighbors to see if they're okay.
- Treat the injuries you can with a first-aid kit.
- Don't touch downed power lines or nearby trees.
- Find important documents.
- Alert your insurance agent or company.
- Read your policy and follow claim instructions.

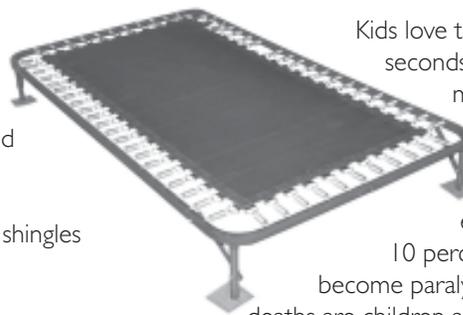


- Photograph damages.
- Protect property by making temporary repairs.
- Keep receipts of repairs and supplies.
- Compile a list of damaged items.
- Don't discard anything before the insurance company adjuster arrives.

Insurance policies and procedures for hurricane and flood insurance differ from state to state. Log on to the New Jersey Department of Banking and Insurance's

hurricane Web site at [www.state.nj.us/dobi/hurricane.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/dobi/hurricane.htm) for more details or contact us with specific questions. We'll be happy to help!

## TRAMPOLINES AND YOUR HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE



Kids love to defy gravity even if it's only for a few seconds at a time. Bouncing around on a trampoline may be lots of fun—until they crash into one another, hit the edge or bounce completely off. More than 83,000 injuries related to trampolines have been treated in hospital emergency rooms. Of these, approximately 10 percent are head and neck injuries. Some become paralyzed. And some die. Most of these injuries or deaths are children aged five to 13. More than half of these injuries involve more than one child on the trampoline.

There really isn't a safe way for children to use trampolines at home. Constant supervision is needed and the amount of spotting necessary makes it almost impossible for parents to handle.

Insurance companies are not fond of trampolines, due to the risk of injury. Although liability would be covered on your homeowners or renters policy if someone were to get hurt, some companies ask homeowners to remove the trampoline. It is likely your insurance company may have certain requirements if you add a trampoline to your policy, or it may not allow them at all.

Call us before you purchase a trampoline. We will let you know whether your homeowners insurance company is comfortable with the exposure of a trampoline.

Insights & UPDATES

## PUT SAFETY FIRST WHEN BOATING

The most tragic accident is the one that easily could have been prevented. Before you pack the boating gear, consider this: Most boating accidents occur because people don't think about safety. First and foremost, take a Coast Guard-approved safety course. By observing safety guidelines you can help reduce boating accidents.

Carry a first-aid kit and any prescription medicines you need. Equip your boat with a radio and extra batteries. Bring your cell phone with you. Everyone on board

should have a Coast Guard-approved flotation device. Leave the alcohol behind. Fifteen percent of boating fatalities are attributed to alcohol.

File a float plan with a relative or friend before you leave on a trip, no matter the distance. Include in this plan a description of your boat, with the identification number, the names of all persons on your boat, your

destination and estimated return time.

Another important item to consider is insurance for your boat. You may need specialized coverage for your vessel. A typical homeowners policy covers liability for damage to property and bodily injury to others when the craft is a sailboat

under 26 feet, or when it is powered by an outboard motor of 25 horsepower or less. While the policy may cover up to \$1,000 for damage to your boat and

trailer, theft and sea perils including sinking, stranding, running aground, and collision are not covered. You would be well served by a policy specifically designed to cover physical damage to boats, liability for damage and/or injury, medical payments and uninsured boaters.

Give our agency a call. We can design a watercraft policy specific to you.



## TUNE UP YOUR AUTO INSURANCE POLICY

"The more things change, the more they stay the same."

While this arguably accurate—if pessimistic—world view echoes with the ring of truth for some, those who try to apply French philosophy to auto insurance run the risk of higher than necessary premiums, or worse—insufficient coverage when they need it most.

The circumstances of our lives *do* change, and auto insurance policies should be reviewed year to year.

### CONSIDER YOUR CURRENT POLICY

If you'd like to reduce your premiums, think about increasing your deductible (the amount of loss you agree to pay in case of an accident before the insurance company's payment responsibility kicks in). Sometimes, a deductible increase from \$100 to \$1,000 can save you 25 percent of your annual premium. Make certain, however, you keep your deductible at a level you truly can afford.

If you have an older vehicle, contemplate dropping collision and/or comprehensive coverage. Check your vehicle's value in the *Kelley Blue Book* for a general idea of the value your insurance company sees in your ride. If the assessment is less than \$1,000, it might be smart to drop these optional coverages.

A clean driving record over the course of three or more years may entitle you to a special discount. If you've moved closer to work or started making use of public transportation, you may be eligible for lower premiums. Anti-theft devices and other after-market safety enhancements may help reduce your premium. Call us to see which rate cuts may apply to you.

Also, work with us to identify and eliminate policy gaps. Saving money is good, but if you're involved in an accident and you don't have the right coverage, you'll wish you'd made the investment.

### COMPARISON SHOP WITH JUST ONE STOP

All good consumers shop around for the best price—that's just prudent. For the best deal, work with an *independent* insurance agent. Independent agents are free to shop around, choosing from a variety of insurance companies to design coverage that's right for you, at a rate you can afford.

## CHOOSE A PROFESSIONAL, INDEPENDENT AGENT

Purchasing insurance can be an expensive proposition, especially if you don't get proper counseling before you choose your coverages. You need to talk to a professional, trained in advising you on the financial implications of your choices.

This is expertise you get when you deal with our agency. We can evaluate your unique circumstances and then tailor coverages to meet your specific needs.

Because we're independent agents, we can shop for insurance through many insurance companies to get you the best coverage at the best price. We are also able to give you more objective advice because we are not employed by an insurance company. We will help you watch out for your best interest. We offer personalized, face-to-face service. And, we will counsel you personally—no long-distance phone calls.

It's all about choice. Be sure you make the right one.



## LONG-TERM CARE. WHAT IS IT AND DO I NEED IT?



Long-term care insurance coverage will help you with the care and costs you may incur when your doctor feels you cannot take care of your basic needs. With today's population aging, most of us understand the need for long-term care insurance. Most of us know at least one person who has stayed in a nursing home or needed professional home health care. The financial consequences of long-term health care can have a significant impact on your family's savings and lifestyle. In the past, it was left up to the children to care for their aging parents. But the changing times have made it almost impossible for many adult children to financially help their parents as they had planned. Add the increasing uncertainty of health care benefits for senior citizens, LTC is one way to protect our elders.

### THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT (LTC) INSURANCE

Don't assume you have this coverage. LTC is not covered by most health insurance policies or disability insurance. Discuss your long-term care plans with your family. Consider whether someone in your family could provide care if you need it. Consider a range of options. Don't go for the cheapest policy. Sometimes the least expensive policy is not the wisest choice. Buy only the coverage you need. Most people don't need a policy that covers nursing home care for many years. Ideally, you should buy a LTC policy at a young age. Most policies are based on your age when you purchase it. Be sure your policy benefits are protected against inflation so it meets your needs in the future.

Call our agency. We'll be happy to discuss long-term care with you and your family. We want you to understand the details of coverage provided by an LTC policy. We want to help you be sure your golden years are truly golden.

## RENOVATING A HOME? PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY.



The improvement of a home is an excellent time to revisit your insurance needs.

A new life insurance policy may be in order to make sure your family will not lose their home if you die. Taking out a policy in the amount of the mortgage gives you plenty of coverage, even as the size of your mortgage decreases.

If you are remodeling, make sure you have adequate coverage during and after construction. Homeowners insurance provides basic coverage for the dwelling, personal property and liability.

Call our agency before you begin your remodeling. We'll make sure you have the coverage you need.



## FIGHT FRAUD

The Department of Banking and Insurance estimates that insurance fraud costs the average New Jersey household \$200 to \$300 a year in added premiums. Lawmakers are working on bills that would help prevent fraud. The main types of fraud are staged accidents and phony or exaggerated medical bills. If you are concerned about your auto insurance costs, be sure to contact the governor and your state legislators and urge them to reach an agreement on reforms to drive the cost of fraud out of the state's auto insurance system.

## USE YOUR HEAD: WEAR A HELMET

Wearing a helmet can help prevent serious head injuries and fatal accidents whenever you or your family ride bikes, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles or go in-line skating or skateboarding. Research shows that helmets, when worn properly, can prevent up to 88 percent of cyclists' brain injuries.

Wear a helmet specifically designed for the activity in which you are participating. They should be comfortable and well fitting. If your helmet has been involved in an accident or is cracked, replace it.

New Jersey has specific laws regarding helmets. If you are riding a motorcycle, regardless of age, you must wear a helmet. On bicycles, if you're under age 14, you must wear a helmet.



## RAISE THE BAR; LOWER THE EXPECTATIONS

When we purchase and move into new homes, much about the quality of the home's construction is hidden from those of us who are architecturally challenged. How do we know the contractor didn't cut corners to increase profit or if the builder had the experience to do the job right? Most of us are unable to determine whether our family is moving into a safe home.

Fortunately, our local governments enforce building codes that establish minimum standards for construction that ensure our safety and protect our investment. Periodically, these standards are revised to reflect current views of what

constitutes acceptable construction methods and materials.

Unfortunately, whenever the town raises the bar on building codes, many homeowners must lower their expectations of insurance protection from the typical homeowners policy. This is because, regardless of the amount of insurance purchased on the dwelling, the policy does not cover the added cost to rebuild the same dwelling under current building codes. The policy only promises to pay for costs to rebuild the dwelling as it existed when the loss occurred.

Although some policies offer an automatic 10 percent of the coverage limit

on the dwelling to pay for additional costs to bring the dwelling up to code, this amount may not be sufficient. Under most building codes, if damage to a dwelling exceeds 50 percent, the undamaged portion must be demolished and rebuilt. These expenses, in addition to the costs to bring the entire dwelling up to code, are best covered by an "ordinance or law" endorsement for additional premium.

Even if your policy insures your dwelling on the basis of replacement cost, you still need this specific coverage. Please call our office if you would like us to quote the additional premium for this protection, so that all the costs to rebuild are covered.