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Personal Touch

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Conduct a homeowners insurance checkup

When was the last time you evaluated your **homeowners insurance**? Have your needs changed since you initially purchased your homeowners policy? If so, there may be gaps in your insurance coverage. For example, you may have acquired valuable possessions that require extra coverage, or you may have made some home improvements that have increased the value of your home. How might this affect your finances in the event that you need to replace your home and its contents due to unforeseen circumstances? Use the checklist on pages 3 and 4 to evaluate your needs, and consider these tips to keep your insurance up-to-date:

Be familiar with your homeowners policy. Read your policy's provisions, limits, and exclusions, and contact one of our insurance professionals with any questions. Set up a meeting to analyze any potential homeowner risks that may be applicable to your particular situation.

Regularly assess your cost to rebuild. If you had to rebuild

your home and replace its contents, would you have enough insurance to cover the rebuilding and replacement costs? Be sure to regularly assess your cost to rebuild, including your personal possessions, so that you can adjust your insurance coverage for appreciation, rising construction costs, and home improvements. We can help you with this process.

Check community building codes. Sometimes, a damaged home can't be reconstructed *exactly* as it was without violating current building codes. For instance, the home may need electrical rewiring or special windows due to updated safety or energy codes. Knowing about these potential expenses *in advance* can give you time to obtain the necessary insurance protection to cover the extra expense.

Keep an updated home inventory. Documenting your possessions, both on videotape and on paper, may prove invaluable should you need to file a claim or replace your home's contents after a disas-

ter. Update this inventory yearly. Be sure to store extra copies in a safe place outside your home.

Evaluate your liability exposure. Does your homeowners policy offer enough liability coverage for your needs? A **personal umbrella policy** may be a worthwhile consideration. Umbrella policies provide excess liability coverage in \$1,000,000 increments and apply to situations that your current policies might not cover.

A homeowners insurance policy can help protect you and your family from devastating financial loss as a result of damage to your property. It offers protection against expenses you otherwise might not be able to afford. Failure to maintain proper coverage may result in your sharing a greater portion of a loss than you had expected.

Although insurance originated over 3,000 years ago, it has evolved to keep pace with society's needs. Conduct a regular review of your homeowners insurance coverage to ensure that it keeps pace with *your* needs.



Frozen pipes: a preventable nightmare

As temperatures plummet, pipes can freeze and cause serious problems for homeowners. Water expands as it freezes. This can cause pipes to crack or burst. Pipes with inadequate insulation and ventilation can also freeze. Certain pipes, such as those near exterior walls, and in crawl spaces, basements, attics, and garages, are most susceptible to freezing.

Follow the tips below to prevent frozen pipes this winter:

- Insulate all exposed pipes in your basement, attic, and outside walls, as well as under your home. Follow manufacturer's instructions when using heat tape, as improper usage can create a fire hazard. Also, be aware that heat tape can wear out so be sure to check it before the winter months.
- Make sure you and all members of your household know how to shut off the water in case a pipe should burst.
- Disconnect garden hoses, and shut off and drain water from pipes leading to outside faucets.
- Winterize sprinkler systems according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Using a compressor to blow out excess water may be the best way to prevent frozen pipes.
- Leave cabinet doors open, so more heat can reach pipes under a sink or appliance.
- Make sure heat is left on and set no lower than 55 degrees, even if your home is vacant.
- If you are going away, have someone check your home daily to ensure that the heat is working properly.

- When weather is extremely cold, leave faucets dripping slightly to circulate water and avoid freezing.
- If a pipe bursts, shut off the water! Quick action can minimize damage.

If you suspect a frozen pipe, call a plumber. Turn off the water and leave the faucets on. Never try to thaw a pipe with a torch or other open flame, and never use electrical appliances in areas of standing water, as electric shock is possible.

Damage caused by frozen pipes may be covered by homeowners insurance. It is important to review your policy to know what your policy covers and to ensure that you have adequate coverage. To learn more about protecting your home and your belongings, contact one of our qualified insurance professionals.

Can-do candle safety

In the midst of winter, nothing transforms a house into a home more quickly than a candle. However, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA, 2008), an estimated 15,600 home fires were started by candles in 2005. These fires resulted in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and an estimated property loss of over \$500 million. But you needn't stop lighting those lovely aromatic votives—simply do so with caution and awareness.

Follow these safety rules from the National Candle Association (NCA, 2008):

- Always keep a burning candle within sight. Extinguish all candles before going to sleep or leaving the house.
- Keep candles out of the reach of pets and children.
- Always use a candleholder specifically designed for that purpose. The candleholder should be heat resistant, sturdy, and big enough to catch dripping wax. Never place pillars or candles directly on furniture.
- Trim candle wicks to ¼" before lighting or re-lighting, and keep the wax free of matches, wick trimmings, dust, and other debris. An excessively long or wild flame is an indication that you may need to trim your wick.
- Never touch or move a candle when the wax is liquid.
- Keep lit candles at a safe distance from anything that might accidentally catch fire, such as plants, curtains, bedding, books, or other flammable items.
- Avoid placing candles near open windows, ceiling fans, or any source of drafts to prevent uncontrolled flames or the blowing of flammable items into the candle.
- When there's only an inch or two of remaining wax, it's time for a new candle.
- A candle snuffer is the safest way to extinguish a flame, as blowing can produce smoke or cause hot wax to spill.

Especially in winter, candles really can turn a house into a home. Just be sure to keep them burning safely. To learn more, visit the NCA website at www.candle-safety.org.

Your personal checklist

Just as your health needs an annual checkup, so does your insurance program. Although you may be unaware of it, your financial profile has probably changed over the past year. Therefore, you may need to adjust your insurance coverage. Please take the time to complete this checklist and mail it back to us in the enclosed envelope. Or, if you prefer to discuss your insurance needs in person, please call to schedule an appointment.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Check yes or no. If yes, on a separate piece of paper, please provide a brief description or explanation.

- Yes No 1. Do you have collectibles such as antiques, fine art, stamps, coins, or baseball cards?
- Yes No 2. Do you own valuable jewelry or furs?
- Yes No 3. Do you own costly sporting equipment or firearms?
- Yes No 4. Do you have expensive cameras or other photography equipment?
- Yes No 5. Do you have any alarms installed in your home? If so, what types and are they monitored?
- Yes No 6. Do you keep more than \$200 cash in your home?
- Yes No 7. Are your personal belongings insured for their full replacement value?
- Yes No 8. Do you have children away at college?
- Yes No 8a. If so, are their possessions insured?
- Yes No 9. Do you own tools, equipment, or instruments used in your trade or profession?
- Yes No 10. Do you operate an office or studio in your home?
- Yes No 11. Do clients come into your home to make purchases/conduct business?
- Yes No 12. Are you concerned with water backup through sewers or drains?
- Yes No 13. Do you or your resident children babysit for a fee?
- Yes No 14. Do you have a dog, cat, or other animal?
- Yes No 15. Have you recently remodeled or redecorated your home?
- Yes No 15a. Do you have plans to do so?
- Yes No 16. If your home was totally damaged, would your insurance cover your home's full replacement value?
- Yes No 17. Are you interested in flood insurance for your home and personal property?
- Yes No 18. Are you interested in earthquake coverage?
- Yes No 19. Do you use a wood, coal, or pellet-burning stove?
- Yes No 20. Do you have a swimming pool?
- Yes No 21. Do you own rental or investment property?
- Yes No 22. Do you own a vacation residence (e.g., condo, cabin, or trailer)?
- Yes No 23. If you rent, do you carry renters insurance?
- Yes No 24. If you own a condo, do you have condo insurance?

- Yes No 25. Do you plan to purchase a new vehicle this year?
- Yes No 25a. If so, would you like us to provide you with an insurance estimate on the vehicle(s) you are considering?
Write year, make, model, and type of vehicle(s): _____
- Yes No 26. Does our agency insure all your vehicles?
- Yes No 27. Does your automobile policy list the names of all drivers living in your household?
- Yes No 28. Do you routinely drive vehicles you do not own?
- Yes No 29. Do you have non-factory installed equipment (like stereos, DVD players, navigation systems, etc.) in your car?
- Yes No 29a. If so, would you like a quote on insuring those items?
- Yes No 30. Do you own a vehicle with custom furnishings or equipment (e.g., a conversion van)?
- Yes No 31. If your vehicle were damaged in an accident, would you need your current automobile policy to reimburse you for a rental car while yours is being repaired?
- Yes No 32. Do you own any of the following recreational vehicles?
- Boat Camper All-Terrain Vehicle Motor Home Golf Cart
- Snowmobile Motorcycle Moped Other _____
- Yes No 33. Do you carry at least a \$1,000,000 umbrella liability policy?
- Yes No 34. Do you own a business?
- Yes No 34a. If so, do we currently insure it?
- Yes No 35. Do you plan to start a business?
- Yes No 36. Would you like a no-obligation review of your life insurance needs for your business (e.g., key person life insurance)?
- Yes No 37. Do you have professional liability or malpractice coverage?
- Yes No 38. Do you and your family have health insurance coverage?
- Yes No 39. Do you have disability income insurance?
- Yes No 39a. Do other family members need such coverage?
- Yes No 40. Do you have life insurance that would pay your mortgage in the event of your death?
- Yes No 41. Would you like a no-obligation review of your personal life insurance needs?
- Yes No 42. Do you have long-term care coverage to protect your savings from expensive nursing home costs?
- Yes No 43. Do you know anyone else who might benefit from a no-obligation insurance review from our agency?
Please list: _____

Please sign and date this form and return it to us in the enclosed envelope.

Signature _____ Date _____

Please call or stop by if you have any questions or concerns. We are happy to serve your needs. We appreciate your time and valuable input. Thank you!