

INSURANCE OFFICES - TEXAS



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Personal Touch

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Cleaning up after a disaster

Once the shock of a disaster wanes, it's time to regroup and pick up the pieces. When cleaning up after a fire, storm, or flood, the homeowner has to decide what can be salvaged and what must be thrown away.

In worst case scenarios, such as in the Gulf Coast region devastated by Hurricane Katrina, standing water, sludge, and sewage can destroy entire homes. But even a flooded basement, leaky roof, or small fire can cause extensive property damage for many homeowners. Time is of the essence in these situations, and the most success comes when you are able to respond to damage within 48 hours. In order to minimize loss and properly clean up in the event of a disaster, consider the following areas of concern.

1. Your Home's Structural Integrity. Keeping your house well-maintained can help ensure it is structurally sound, possibly enhancing its capacity to withstand a destructive storm or flood. Should a disaster strike, it is important

to have a professional inspect the foundation for any shifts, cracks, or weaknesses. In the event of serious flooding or a fire, the wooden frame should be dried out and decontaminated to eliminate any mold.

2. Appliances, Heating Systems, and Water Heaters. Have a service professional inspect the functionality of your appliances. While washers and dryers, refrigerators, and dishwashers may still work, water damage may reduce their efficiency or lifespans. Furnaces and water heaters may need to be replaced because repair and cleaning is often difficult and costly.

3. Interior Restoration. Professional restoration services may be able to speed-dry a house that experiences water damage, minimizing the homeowner's loss. Hardwood floors allowed to dry may be restored, but carpeting will likely need to be replaced, especially when damaged by toxic or dirty water. Similarly, wood furniture may be refinished, while upholstered furniture will likely need to be discarded. Clothing and

bedding that can withstand a heavy-duty cleaning can be salvaged, but avoid trying to save anything made of porous materials that came in contact with contaminated water.

4. Document Preservation. Important insurance, tax, and financial documents, books, photos, and artwork should always be stored in a dry place that does not experience severe temperature shifts from extreme heat to extreme cold. Paper and other organic materials are particularly vulnerable to mold and should be air-dried within 48 hours.

Bear in mind that once water is gone, mold becomes a dangerous, lingering contaminant. Eliminating moisture and getting things to dry out is often the homeowner's greatest challenge.

To minimize your financial loss, make sure your homeowners insurance is appropriate. Because homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage, be sure to ask your insurance agent about purchasing flood insurance if you are at risk. For more information, please give us a call.



Review your insurance needs annually

The amount of insurance you need can change a great deal from year to year. As a result, evaluating your insurance coverage should always be added to your list of annual reviews.

To refresh your memory about the amount of insurance you have and its coverage limits, carefully re-read both your **auto** and **homeowners or renters insurance** policies. Be sure you are familiar with their provisions and exclusions.

Auto Insurance

Check the *types* and *amounts* of insurance you have, and make sure that your liability limits are sufficient should you be involved in an accident. If you wish to save money on your premiums, consider increasing your collision and comprehensive deductibles.

Homeowners and Renters Insurance

Unfortunately, no one's home is immune to the possibility of a burglary or destruction from a natural

disaster. Therefore, you need to be prepared. It is essential to have enough insurance coverage to rebuild your home and replace its contents at today's costs.

An independent appraiser or an agent from our office can help you estimate the current cost of rebuilding your home. A home inventory and appraisal of valuable, unique items may be beneficial to this task, especially if you are unsure about the value of your possessions. Make a detailed list of all your personal belongings; then photograph or videotape each room in your home, including closets and cabinets. Be sure to keep important receipts, document the serial numbers of your appliances and electronic equipment, and store a copy of the final inventory in a safe place away from home.

Are There Gaps in Your Coverage?

As part of your insurance review, you need to recognize that your basic homeowners policy and auto policy may not be enough to cover your current needs. For instance, you may need additional insurance to protect your home and its contents against a flood

or earthquake. If you own antiques or other valuables, you might need to insure them separately.



Most people, especially homeowners or those with substantial assets, should consider a **personal umbrella policy**. Personal umbrellas provide at least one million dollars in excess liability limits and broaden protection to include many situations that basic policies do not cover. This coverage is becoming more and more important as individuals are becoming increasingly willing to initiate litigation aimed at recovering large damage awards.

We would be happy to answer any questions you may have and help you fill in any gaps in your coverage.

Six easy ways to trim auto insurance costs

Would you like to reduce the cost of insuring your vehicle? Here are some tips that can help you save money on your auto insurance:

- **Raise your deductibles.** Higher deductibles mean you assume more of the risk for small claims. However, be sure to set deductibles at limits you can comfortably afford, since you will have to pay for them out of pocket if an accident occurs.
- **Drive defensively.** Traffic violations and accidents can raise your premiums.
- **Buy a low-profile car.** It costs less to insure autos that have a smaller chance of being stolen and are less expensive to repair. A higher safety rating may also reduce your premiums.
- **Reduce insurance on older cars.** As your car ages, it may not be cost-effective to continue carrying the same amount of insurance as you did when it was new.
- **Inquire about discounts.** Some companies offer a multi-policy discount if they insure both your house and your car. Others may offer discounts for seniors, student drivers with good grades, or long-time customers.
- **Update your policy, as necessary.** If you move, get married, or no longer insure a young driver, be sure to update your insurance.

By following the above tips, you can keep your costs to a minimum and ensure a "smooth ride" with the proper insurance coverage. Be sure to contact us for further information about your individual circumstances.

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 suffered a total loss, 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 CD players, cassette decks, or other non-factory installed equipment (like car phones, stereos, 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 Others _____
- 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, and appreciate your time and valuable input. Thank you!