

Insights and Updates

[Fall 2015 • New York]

Want a car? Don't forget the photo inspection

Are you thinking of purchasing a car? Did you know that New York state may require a photo inspection of a car before an auto insurance policy can be issued?

This inspection documents the existence of the car; its physical condition; and existing options and accessories. It is designed to reduce the cost of automobile physical damage insurance coverage (e.g., collision and comprehensive) and reduce the possibility of fraudulent claims.

Recently, the Department of Financial Services, which oversees the insurance regulations in New York state, adopted a new regulations that will make it easier for auto insurance policyholders to comply with the state's mandatory photo inspection rules.

The new regulations include the following changes that will affect policyholders:

- An increase in the inspection deferral period from five to 14 calendar days.
- A reduction in the minimum time frame from four years to two years for a policyholder to be eligible for an inspection waiver for an additional and/or replacement automobile when the policyholder has been continuously insured for

automobile insurance, with the same insurer or another insurer under common control or ownership.

- The allowance of an inspection waiver when a policyholder under a new policy had the automobile continuously insured for physical damage coverage by a previous insurer that inspected the automobile within the prior two years.
- Recognition of the use of new technology (e.g., digital photography; electronic storage and retrieval of inspection reports and photographs; and use of email).
- The expansion of the current renewal inspection notice requirement from 33 days prior to renewal date to at least 45 days, but no more than 60 calendar days prior to the annual policy renewal date in order to track the law.

Index

| | |
|---|---|
| Renters insurance?..... | 2 |
| Insurance and the electric wheelchair..... | 2 |
| Cars and homes need a checkup before winter | 3 |
| Hosting a holiday party..... | 4 |
| News from our agency | 4 |

- The amendment of the definitions to clarify the types of vehicles subject to the inspection requirement and establishes definitions for a new, unused automobile; durable medium; and new automobile dealer.

If you are thinking of buying a car, it's a good idea to give our agency a call before you head to the car dealership. We can help you crunch the numbers to see how much your premium will change and we can help answer any questions you might have about your insurance policy.



Renters insurance?

While your landlord should carry coverage for the structure he or she is renting out, the policy probably doesn't cover the contents you've brought into it, regardless of whether you are renting an apartment, a single-family home or even a loft. Fortunately, renters insurance is one of the most affordable coverages you can buy.

There are several variables that are affected by your living situation. For example, the amount of coverage you need depends on how much you have. Renters insurance also offers you liability insurance, which would protect you for bodily injury or property damage caused to another person (e.g., your bathtub overflows and leaks into the downstairs apartment or a person is injured during a visit).

Should you and your roommate share a renters policy? Renters insurance protects only the property of the individuals listed on a policy. So, unless your roommate is listed as a named insured (or is a domestic partner, spouse or member of your family), he or she will not be covered and we recommend a separate policy. Every situation is different and we are here to help you navigate your insurance needs. Give us a call.

Insurance and the electric wheelchair

Electric wheelchairs and their cousins, mobility scooters, provide valuable, life-changing assistance for those with impaired movement. The impact these vehicles have on lives cannot be overstated. The impact they have on one's bank account is substantial as well.

Like any significant investment, owning a wheelchair or scooter brings with it insurance implications. "What happens if it's damaged or stolen?" is a popular worry. Luckily, it's a possession covered by standard homeowners or renters insurance—and exempt from the motor-vehicle exclusion that requires us to secure separate coverage for cars and trucks. Therefore, homeowners or renters insurance would reimburse you should your electric wheelchair or scooter be damaged or stolen—up to your policy limits and subject to policy deductibles.

However, if you have, or anticipate needing such a vehicle, you should give us a call or stop by the office to talk.

Such expensive and critical medical equipment may warrant a policy add-on called a rider to cover it properly. With a rider, we can be sure the full value of the chair or scooter is covered, and we may even be able to save you the cost of a deductible should you file a claim.

Of course, that covers just owning the vehicle. Concerns emerge regarding liability when you consider operating a wheelchair or scooter.

A standard homeowners or renters policy offers personal liability coverage starting at \$100,000 per occurrence, which is defined as "a single accident, or damage resulting from a prolonged exposure to the same set of conditions."

You may wish to increase that amount with a personal umbrella policy. Umbrella policies can extend coverage into the \$5-10 million range. Regardless, you really should give us a call or stop by the office to talk. We're always glad to see you, and we'll make sure you get coverage you can afford.





Cars and homes need a checkup before winter

As the leaves start to drop this autumn, we know that cold temperatures aren't far behind. Now is the time to prepare your homes and cars so you can be worry-free and enjoy the pleasures of a winter wonderland.

Have you winterized your home?

Once the autumn leaves have finished falling, clean out your gutters. Gutters blocked with dead leaves can cause ice dams during the winter months. While you're up on that ladder, check out the condition of your gutters—make sure there aren't any leaks or misaligned pipes, and make sure the downspouts carry water away from your house's foundation.

As the wind begins to pick up outside, check to make sure you don't have any drafts. Use caulk and door sweeps to take care of the drafty areas. Experts recommend that you have at least 12 inches of insulation in an attic. It is also important to ensure your pipes are insulated properly to prevent freezing. Don't forget the annual maintenance of your furnace, heating system and chimney, and check the duct work to make sure your vents are well-connected and insulated.

Once you've taken stock of your home, give our agency a call. Now is the perfect

time to make sure you have the right insurance coverage in your homeowners policy—especially if your fall review revealed the need for some costly repairs.

Driving in a winter wonderland

Although modern conveniences allow us to trudge through snow and slush with relatively few concerns, winter travel can be a

“... make sure you have the right insurance coverage in your homeowners policy—especially if your fall review revealed the need for some costly repairs.”

difficult obstacle to overcome. Will your car be ready for winter's extremes? Don't wait until the roads start freezing to find out. Prepare your car now:

- Check the antifreeze levels and the firmness of hoses and clamps.
- Check the tires for wear and make sure they are properly inflated.

- Keep your gas tank filled. This will keep you warm and safe if you get lost or stranded, and the extra weight will improve your traction. With a full tank, there also is less room for condensation, which means your fuel lines are less likely to freeze.
 - Remember, four-wheel drive doesn't help your vehicle stop. You may be able to drive through a bigger pile of snow, but you'll still skid on ice.
 - If you have a rear-wheel drive vehicle, consider keeping a bag of sand over your rear axle.
 - Remember to check your battery. Even though your car might be ready to roll, accidents do happen. Keep blankets, water and a roadside emergency kit in your trunk. Travel with a cell phone.
- Remember: If you have an accident, contact our agency as soon as possible to report the claim. We won't leave you out in the cold alone.



Hosting a holiday party



Are you planning to host a holiday party? As your professional, independent insurance agent, we can help you plan for coverage if a guest is injured in your home. Before you host your party, call us. Let us check your homeowners policy for adequate limits; what coverages you have and what coverages you might need.

When planning a gathering, have plenty of nonalcoholic beverages available. Home hosts have a double duty to be courteous and entertaining, but also to be responsible and conscientious about the alcohol they serve. Most importantly, they must see that intoxicated guests do not get behind the wheel of a car, creating a risk of harm to themselves and others on the road. Here are simple ways to reduce holiday-party risks:

- Limit access to the bar if minors are on the guest list. You should verify your young guests are of age before you serve them an alcoholic beverage.

- Have a responsible bartender. Ask a friend or relative you trust to act as a bartender.
- Offer a variety of nonalcoholic beverages such as sparkling water, juice and soft drinks.
- Create a setting conducive to easy, comfortable socializing. Entertain guests with music, games and dancing.
- Always serve food when serving alcohol. High-protein foods such as meat and cheese take longer to digest, slowing the rate at which the body absorbs alcohol. However, try not to serve salty foods. They can make people thirsty, so they drink more.
- Cut off access to the bar one to two hours before the end of the party. Serve nonalcoholic beverages and desserts at that time.
- Have a designated driver.

Give us a call. We will help you determine what is needed to make sure you are adequately protected.

News from our agency

Here are the top six reasons to work with a professional, independent insurance agent:

6. If you don't remember your account number, that's OK.
5. Choices, choices, choices. An independent agent isn't obliged to work with just one insurance carrier and make your insurance needs fit that policy.
4. An independent agent will sit down with you to advise you on your insurance coverage needs.
3. An independent agent is based in your community and understands the insurance factors of your area.

2. If you need to file a claim, there's a good chance that the person you talked to the day you bought your insurance policy will be the person who helps you through the claim process.

And, the No. 1 reason to work with a professional, independent insurance agent: Give our agency a call or stop by the office. We can help you find the insurance policy that's right for you. We can even review your current insurance policy to make sure there aren't any gaps in your coverage.

