



# Staying in Touch

Tips, strategies, and advice to help you choose the right insurance coverage

## Could This Happen To You?

The following is a true story provided by a member of our Association. It illustrates how important it is to be prepared for emergencies.

*Our hydro went out last March, when the ice storm hit. High winds and severe cold weather hampered the efforts of the workmen who were braving the elements to repair service to the affected areas.*

*We were reasonably prepared for the blackout, with a woodstove for warmth and candles to light our way. However, our nightmare began after I took our dog out for a walk. Coming back into the house, I found that the candle in my living room had fallen over and our couch was ablaze. Unbelievably calm, I remembered the fire extinguisher. As I pulled the extinguisher out of the cupboard where it's buried, I yelled for my children to hurry downstairs and put on their coats. I thought: "This cannot be too difficult, can it?"*

*As I hurried back to the living room, (a matter of 90 seconds had passed) I observed the curtains were on fire, the carpet was burning, and the couch was fully engulfed in flames. The room was quickly filling with acid smoke from the burning upholstery and flames were licking at the walls and across the ceiling. Shaking as I held the fire extinguisher, I pulled the pin and managed to squeeze the trigger. Unfortunately, the small extinguisher lasted long enough to put out only half the flames on the couch. My eyes were watering profusely and I realized that this was beyond my capabilities. I dropped the extinguisher and ran out the door, directing the children ahead of me. It didn't take long before I felt the bitter*

*cold of the night, as I was wearing my bedroom slippers and no coat.*

*Horrified and cold, my children and I watched as the high winds fed the fire and one window after another exploded in the night air. Although the volunteer fire department arrived after only 11 minutes, all that was left of our house, within an hour, was a blackened hulk. The second floor had fallen in on the first floor and everything was gone.*

*Fortunately, no one was hurt. But now with no home, no clothes and a family huddled in the cold, we needed help. I called our insurance broker who calmly offered advice, suggested a place to stay and assured me we were adequately covered. He helped make our horrible experience a little more bearable.*

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Your best insurance  
is an Insurance Broker

### Prepare for an Emergency

What started out as a simple power outage for the above family, ended in catastrophe. When disaster strikes you may not have much time to act. Learn how to protect yourself and your family in an emergency. First discuss emergency planning with your family and develop a plan that suits your needs. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, a Federal agency offers a series of self-help advice brochures for families and individuals to help you prepare for emergencies. Visit [www.ocipep.gc.ca](http://www.ocipep.gc.ca) to learn more.

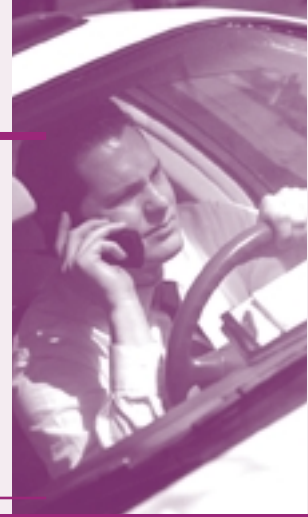
## Tips for Identifying Car Insurance Scams

Insurance fraud is estimated to cost insurers over \$2 billion annually. You can help eliminate automobile insurance scams – and help lower car insurance premiums – by being an informed consumer.

The Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) has released a brochure entitled: *“Tips for Identifying Car Insurance Scams.”* It describes how some scams work, offers tips on dealing with tow truck drivers, paralegals, and healthcare providers, and lets you know what to do if you suspect fraudulent activity. This brochure is available by visiting FSCO’s website at [www.fSCO.gov.on.ca](http://www.fSCO.gov.on.ca), or by calling FSCO’s 24-hour information line toll-free at 1-800-668-0128 (in Toronto call 416-250-7250).

Only you can prevent fraud. Know your rights and take action to make sure only legitimate payments are paid under your policy. It’s up to you.

**Referral fees are illegal!**  
*It is illegal for tow truck drivers to be paid a fee to refer accident victims to a particular paralegal or a repair shop. It is also illegal for paralegals to refer accident victims to a particular healthcare provider for a fee. If you suspect this is happening, report it to us, and contact the police.*



## When All You Have Left is Your Insurance!

Insurance is a complicated and sometimes frustrating purchase that you make each year to protect your vehicle, property, personal possessions, or business. These important purchases cannot be taken lightly!

### Why deal with an independent insurance broker?

1. Independent insurance brokers offer added value for your premium dollars by giving you choices, quality products, sound advice, and local personal service – something you can’t readily get from a call centre, or direct writer!
2. Independent insurance brokers are trained professionals who understand your personal insurance needs and the specific needs of your business.
3. Independent insurance brokers act as your insurance buyer. We “shop” the insurance marketplace to make sure you get the broadest possible coverage at a competitive premium.

This is a tremendous advantage to you, and is not available from agents who only sell for one insurance company.

4. Finally, as part of your community, independent brokers contribute everyday by dealing locally, volunteering, sponsoring, supporting, and getting involved in activities that benefit everyone.

### You deserve peace of mind

We sincerely hope you never experience a loss, either minor or catastrophic, but if you should, your coverage is critical. When all you have left is your insurance, it’s reassuring to know your insurance coverage will be there to put you back in the position you were in prior to the loss!

It’s also comforting to know that someone will be there to guide you along the way. That someone is us. That’s why we proudly say: **Your best insurance is an Insurance Broker!**

## Guests, Alcohol, and Your Liability

**It doesn’t matter if it’s in your home, office, or elsewhere,** if you host a party where alcohol is being served, you may be held legally responsible for the actions of an intoxicated guest.

The law defines a host or “occupier” as the person who has control over the property and the power to admit or exclude visitors. This could be a homeowner, an officer of a service club, or a parent renting a banquet hall for their son, or daughter’s wedding.

When it comes to occupier’s liability, as the host you must take reasonable steps to protect your guests from any foreseeable risk of injury. Before a function, be sure to repair loose carpets, broken steps, uneven walkways, and any other potential hazard.

Under most liquor laws, it is an offence to serve or provide alcohol to a person who is legally intoxicated. Once a guest has reached the intoxicated limit, the host has sole responsibility for their actions until they are no longer intoxicated. This could be 24 hours, or longer, depending on the person’s size and the amount of alcohol they have consumed. In addition, by providing alcohol, you can be held liable for injuries your intoxicated guest may cause to another person.

If you are a host, we recommend you remain sober, provide food for your guests, make non-alcoholic drinks available, prohibit drinking games, and stop serving alcohol at least two hours before the function is scheduled to end.

A good way to protect yourself is to purchase a **Party Alcohol Liability** policy to cover a licenced function. Even though many homeowner’s and some commercial policies will defend you against liquor liability lawsuits, we think the cost of this type of policy is worth the peace of mind. If in doubt, call us.



## All-Season Tires or Snows – Should You Change?

Many new cars sold in Ontario come with “all-season” tires. These tires are designed to provide safe, all-weather protection, but are not suitable for snow-covered roads or extreme cold. Once the temperature drops below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ , all-season tires lose their grip as the tires harden. This is definitely not desirable and may account for the rising number of unexpected “loss of control” accidents in cold weather.

Years ago, snow tires were knobby and noisy. They were great for driving in the snow, but performed poorly when exposed to dry and wet road conditions. This is no longer true. Today’s new snow tires are made with rubber compounds that not only handle ice, snow, and cold temperatures, but also dry, wet, or slushy driving conditions. New snow tires are marked with the pictograph of a peaked

mountain with a snowflake to show they meet specific snow traction performance requirements that help you control your vehicle safely in snowy conditions.

If your winter driving is limited to regions with little snow and moderate winter temperatures, all-season tires may be suitable for you. For the rest of us, the traction and security offered by snow tires makes them the best choice. A good way to rationalize the expense of winter tires – at least \$500 a set – is to remember that the cost is equal to the deductible on many auto insurance policies, which means you’ll pay that much anyway if you end up in a crash. As a bonus, by switching to winter tires, you’ll extend the life of your regular “all-season” tires.



## You’ve had a Loss. Now What?

A fire, a burglary, or a flood. Nobody expects it to happen to them. Unfortunately these things do occur. To help reduce the stress and inconvenience of such an event, here’s what you can do before and after a claim.

### BEFORE A CLAIM

- Create an inventory of your home’s contents using a list, photographs, or videotape. Be sure to keep a copy outside your home.
- Make sure your high value items are covered. Sometimes, furs, jewellery, fine arts, and antiques are only covered to a certain limit. Review or appraise their value and confirm if additional (and separate) insurance is required.
- Keep receipts on high value and high target items off site.
- Update your possessions values. It’s easy to overlook the costs of new furniture, appliances, computers, and entertainment electronics. Don’t risk being under-insured.
- Talk to your insurance broker. If you are not sure you have adequate coverage or need more information, call us, we’re here to help.



### AFTER A CLAIM

- Whatever the cause, you are obligated to prevent further loss or damage by securing your home or having emergency repairs done without delay. Call us, or your insurance company’s 24 hour emergency number, for referrals to emergency crews and contractors to assist you.
- You must be able to prove your loss. Prepare a list of lost items with the estimated cost to replace them. You may be required to provide estimates from merchants and suppliers. An inventory list with receipts would make this process fast and easy.
- An insurance adjuster will be appointed by your insurer to work with you to ensure a fair and fast settlement. Co-operate with him/her.
- Many expenses such as emergency repairs and *additional* living costs are covered by your insurance policy. Keep a record and include receipts of these expenses in your claim.
- Talk to your insurance broker. A loss can be a stressful experience. If you have any concerns with your claim or settlement, we’re always here to help you.

## “Slip and Fall” Accidents Can Be Prevented

Members of the public are now more likely to sue when they have been injured on your premises due to a “slip and fall” accident. Studies show the number of claims and the amounts being paid out have increased substantially over the past few years.

All businesses and homeowners have a legal obligation to maintain their premises and ensure that anyone who comes on the property is reasonably safe.

### How am I at risk?

If you are a business owner, you may be at risk of being sued if someone slips, trips, or falls if:

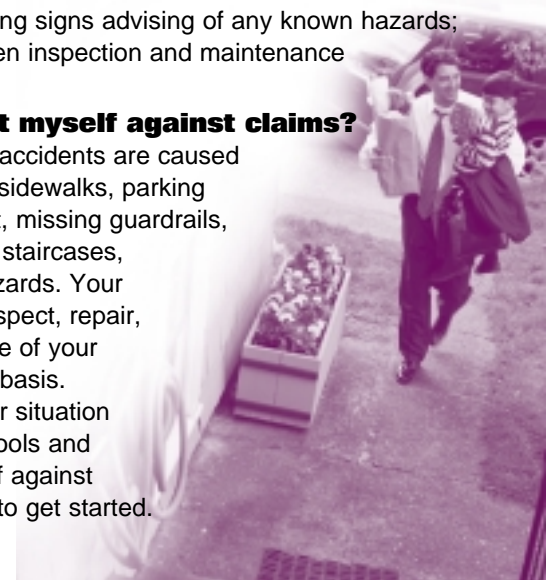
- There is an unsafe condition on your premises;
- You could have foreseen the accident due to a hazardous condition;
- The accident could have been avoided had you taken precautions;

- You fail to post warning signs advising of any known hazards;
- You fail to have written inspection and maintenance procedures in place.

### How can I protect myself against claims?

Most “slip and fall” accidents are caused by slippery walkways, sidewalks, parking lots, uneven pavement, missing guardrails, improperly maintained staircases, wet floors, or other hazards. Your best protection is to inspect, repair, and document the state of your premises on a regular basis.

We can review your situation and provide you with tools and help to protect yourself against claims. Please call us to get started.





## Concerned About an Insurance Issue?

Where do you go if you have a serious complaint or concern about your insurance?

Your first step is to call us. If we can't help you resolve the issue to your satisfaction, we will recommend you make a formal complaint to your insurance company.

Every company has a procedure to deal with complaints. This starts with your insurance company's Consumer Complaint Officer (Ombudsman). A list of all Consumer Complaint Officers (Ombudsmen) and their phone numbers is available on the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) website at [www.fSCO.gov.on.ca](http://www.fSCO.gov.on.ca).

If your issue is still not resolved, request a letter from the company stating its final position on your complaint. From here you will need to write to FSCO's Insurance Ombudsman, describe your complaint and explain why you disagree with the company's position. Make sure that you include a copy of the insurance company's letter. The Insurance Ombudsman will review your written complaint and will attempt to resolve it once and for all.

As your broker, we want to satisfy your needs and concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a serious concern about your insurance, call us first.

## Is Your Home a High Insurance Risk?

Take a look around your home. Are there accidents waiting to happen? Are you vulnerable to disaster, insurance claims, or perhaps a lawsuit?

Maybe it's time to practice a little risk management. This means taking action to prevent and protect yourself from some of the perils that can cause havoc in your life. Many insurance companies are implementing their own risk management practices, such as, regulating the age of oil tanks in order to prevent oil spills and requiring proper woodstove installations to prevent fires.

### Here are some things you can do:

#### 1. Practice good housekeeping

Keep your yard, stairways, and entrance-ways clear. Keep ice and snow away from your walkways and driveways.

#### 2. Consider a monitored security system

Security systems can provide peace of mind and solid risk management. It is important to include both fire and burglary systems to protect against two of the most common types of insurance claims made on homeowner policies.

#### 3. Have your chimney professionally cleaned and your furnace serviced annually

It is good practice to hire a professional chimney sweep to clean your chimney. Even if you have the tools to do it yourself, it is advisable to hire a professional periodically. Be sure to have your home furnace serviced annually for improved efficiency and to reduce the risk of carbon monoxide emissions and furnace blow-backs.

#### 4. Be sure pools are fenced

To prevent a tragic incident, it is very important to ensure that your pool area is totally inaccessible when no one is there to supervise. Make sure the fencing is complete and any gate or entranceway is securely locked.

#### 5. Update electrical systems

If you live in an older home, it is advisable to have a licensed electrician inspect your system. Although there are costs involved, upgrading to a 100 or 200 amp system can make your home a safer place. You can do visual inspections around the home to check for loose wires, cracks in the plastic coating, burn marks from arcing, and improper use of electrical cords.

Electrical cords should not be run under carpets and are not for permanent use. It is also important to be sure that your electrical outlets are not overloaded.

#### 6. Keep up with repairs

As things age around the home, be sure they are maintained, repaired, and if needed, replaced. Important areas to consider are your roof, foundation, sump pumps, bricks, mortar, siding, and oil tank.

By practicing good risk management around the home, you will reduce the risk of insurance claims, as well as the cost, and inconvenience that goes along with them.

