



# Staying in Touch

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

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Your best insurance is an Insurance Broker



If your home has suffered devastating damage, the last thing you want to find out is you don't have enough insurance. But how much do you really need?

When deciding on how much insurance to buy, many people think solely about market value. This is wrong. Market value is simply the selling price of your home. It goes up or down based on the economy, the supply and demand for homes in your neighborhood, local employment levels and other factors. Market value has no connection to building costs.

Instead, we recommend you **Insure to Value**. This means getting enough coverage to completely rebuild your home, in a **timely manner, with like, kind and quality materials, all at today's prices**.

To determine how much insurance you need, first get an accurate appraisal to find out your home's replacement cost. We use a calculation based on the finished area of your home and make adjustments to consider your home's special features such as air conditioning, extra bathrooms, fireplaces, or any other improvements. Some homes, such as historic or heritage properties cannot be insured for exact replacement since some features are not replaceable in either workmanship, materials or practical costs.

If you make substantial improvements to your home, say by adding an extra bathroom, finishing the basement or building a deck, you may need to increase your policy limits to reflect the actual costs to rebuild your house. Remember, call us.

# Ahoy boaters! Do you have your Operators Card yet?

Now it's the Law! Anyone operating a powered vessel of less than 4 meters in length **MUST** have a Pleasure Craft Operator's Card.

## What is a Pleasure Craft Operator Card?

The Pleasure Craft Operator Card is the accepted proof of competency to operate a powered pleasure craft in Canada. The card is valid for life, there are no annual fees and it is made of durable PVC plastic.

Currently, anyone born after April 1, 1983 must carry proof of competency when operating a powered pleasure craft. Failure to carry proof of competency carries a fine of \$250.

Since September 15, 2002, anyone (regardless of age) who operates a powered boat or personal watercraft that is under 4 m (13'-3") in length must carry proof of competency.

After September 15, 2009, operators of all vessels must carry their proof of competency.

Boaters can obtain their operators card after receiving a mark of at least 75% on a Canadian Coast Guard accredited test. The Operator Proficiency Exam tests your understanding of 149 knowledge areas required by the Canadian Coast Guard. Experienced boaters have the option of taking this test without first completing a course. For full details and a list of organizations that have accredited boating safety courses and tests, visit the Canadian Coast Guard web site at [www.ccg-gcc.ca](http://www.ccg-gcc.ca) or call the Boating Safety Infoline at 1-800-267-6687.



# Uninsured Vehicles cost us all!

Uninsured vehicles cost us all through higher insurance premiums. It is estimated every insured passenger vehicle owner pays an extra \$11.50 per year per vehicle to cover the potential damage caused when an uninsured vehicle is involved in an accident. Of this, one dollar goes to the province's Motor Vehicle Accidents Claims Fund to pay claims for those injured by an uninsured vehicle. Since 1996, the government has paid out nearly \$250 million from this fund to cover damage caused by uninsured drivers.

It is estimated that over 400,000 motor vehicles are on Ontario's roads without insurance. Fortunately, steps are underway to reduce the number of uninsured vehicles in the Province.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) and the insurance industry have established the Uninsured Vehicles Project (UV Project) in an effort to reduce fraud and stabilize automobile insurance rates. The UV Project includes a province-wide database that **tracks individual Vehicle Identification Numbers (VINs)**. This database is updated daily by insurance companies and their brokers/agents and will eventually be available to police at the roadside when they need to verify insurance coverage.

To crack down on uninsured drivers, the Ontario government passed Bill 198 in December 2002 that included amendments to both the Highway Traffic Act and the Compulsory Automobile Insurance Act. The regulations for this legislation are now being written. By early 2004, it is expected MTO will use the database to electronically verify the existence of your insurance coverage while you are at the licensing office or kiosk in an effort to prevent the licensing of uninsured vehicles.

## Here's what you can do to help

- 1) Insure your vehicle.
- 2) Record the valid Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) from your vehicle and provide it to us when requesting insurance coverage.
- 3) If you wish to add or remove liability coverages, let us know before attempting to do a licensing transaction at MTO. Be sure to allow a reasonable amount of time for us to update the database for you.
- 4) Make sure the VIN on the dash of your vehicle matches the VIN on your insurance policy and vehicle registration. Report any discrepancies to us and MTO immediately.

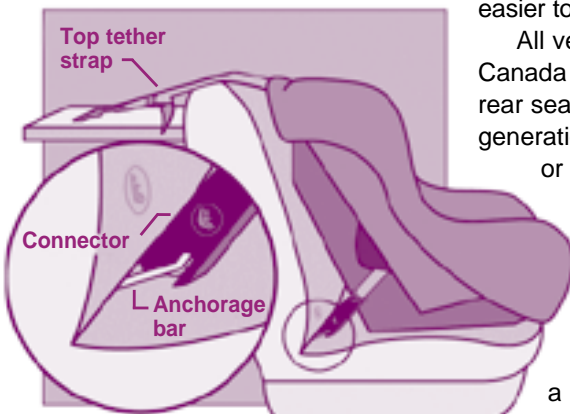
# Keeping our children safe

Transport Canada has introduced a new system that makes it easier to install infant and child seats in cars, minivans and light trucks.

All vehicles manufactured since September 1, 2002 and sold in Canada are now equipped with lower universal anchorage bars in the rear seat. These anchorage bars make it **easier to install** the newest generation of infant and child seats. However, you can still use infant or child seats designed to work with seat belts in these vehicles.

The newest generation of infant and child seats – those manufactured after September 1, 2002 – now have two connectors that attach to a vehicle's lower universal anchorage bars. They also work with the seat belts in vehicles not equipped with lower anchorage bars.

Please remember, whether the child seat is secured by a seat belt or by the new lower universal anchorages, **the top tether strap must be used** on all forward-facing child seats.



Look for this symbol on infant and child seats as well as on a vehicle seat. Consult the vehicle's owner's manual.

## BEWARE! Industry gets Tough on Payment Problems

The insurance industry is taking a tough stand on the problem of late and non-payment of premiums.

Many insurance companies have reduced the number of warning notices sent and will no longer reinstate coverage if a policyholder misses even one payment.

In addition, new insurance applications are being scrutinized to determine if any cancellations for non-payment appear on the applicant's record. Some insurance companies refuse to offer coverage or preferred rating classes if a cancellation for non-payment has occurred in the past 3 years.

Now it is as important to pay for your insurance promptly as it is to avoid claims and traffic violations to keep your rates down. Communicating with us is the best way to keep your rates down and your policy running smoothly.

If you receive a bill for your insurance, pay it promptly. If you feel the bill is higher than it should be due to an error or because you are waiting for a change in your coverage to be processed, call us. We'll discuss whether the options of making a partial payment or waiting for the correction/endorsement are available to you without disturbing your payment history.

If a bank error occurs that causes a payment to be rejected, immediately obtain a letter from the bank stating their error. Submit a copy to us so we can arrange to have your coverage protected and your payment history cleared. Retain a copy of the letter for your records for at least 5 years.

Finally, read your insurance mail promptly. Review all billing notices and payment plan options and requirements. If you are unclear on anything, call us for assistance.

## How to prevent Water Damage to your Home

If you have ever had a flooded basement, you know the damage can be extensive, expensive, and the inconvenience, unforgettable.

### What you can do to prevent or limit a loss

If you have an unfinished basement, we suggest you store items in plastic containers or on shelving at least 12" off the floor. A finished basement requires more aggressive measures to protect your investment.

- If your area is susceptible to sewer backup, make sure your home has a sewer back-flow or check valve installed.
- If you don't have a sump pump, install one. If you do have a sump pump, test it to make sure it is working.
- Because severe weather often causes a hydro interruption, it makes good sense to install a battery back-up device for the sump pump or keep a small gas generator to

power critical electrical circuits. Both of these devices are available at a reasonable cost from any building supply or hardware store.

- Keep eaves and downspouts clear of debris and make sure water flow is directed away from the foundation. If your building code permits it, have the downspouts connected directly to your weeping tiles or sewer drain.
- In winter, keep snow away from the foundation to reduce surface water during sudden spring thaws and winter rains. Areas around ground level windows and window wells should be cleared regularly.
- Finally, as simple as it sounds, make sure your lot is properly graded to direct runoff away from the foundation and entranceways. Do not change the grade or elevation around your home unless proper authorities are consulted because this could affect proper run off.

## Who insures a home under construction?

If you are building a new home or renovating an existing home, you need to review your insurance. For residential buildings under construction or major renovation, a separate 'Dwelling Under Construction' policy or an amended dwelling policy is mandatory. Commercial buildings being constructed require a 'Builder's Risk' policy to insure this exposure.

These policies can be purchased by the owner of the property or by the contractor. The terms of the contract between owner and contractor will usually indicate whose responsibility it is to purchase this form of insurance coverage.

**Never guess where the responsibility lies!** If your contractor agrees to purchase the insurance for your construction project, it's extremely important that you confirm that the coverage is in place prior to the start of construction. Chances are you'll be required to make interim payments to the contractor as the project progresses. As such, we suggest that your name appears on the policy, as an "additional named insured". In this way, your financial interest will be protected should an insured loss occur prior to completion.

If you agree to purchase this form of insurance coverage, make sure you contact us before any construction begins. Most policies require that coverage is put in force prior to the pouring of the foundation. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have and guide you through the process of making sure the coverage you need is solidly in place.



# How you benefit from your Independent Insurance Broker

We're proud to be independent insurance brokers. Each and every day we act as professional insurance advisors to serve all of your insurance needs. Our dedicated employees are continually trained through the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario (IBAO) and other approved programs and courses.

## Qualified

Your independent broker is educated, trained and licensed to sell insurance and provide insurance advice. We're experts at sorting out the complexities of various insurance policies of insurance companies and we present insurance information to you in a clear and no nonsense manner. Through detailed research and daily exposure to

ever-changing property and casualty market conditions, your broker is the most qualified insurance professional in the marketplace.

## Informed

We are the experts who simplify the intricacies of insurance policies. We share our knowledge and present our best recommendations to you. We represent several different insurance companies and we shop around to negotiate the best coverage for your protection matched to the best premiums. Simply put, we work with you to help you make the most informed decision possible.

## Prompt

Over the years we've provided customers like you with prompt and personal service

whether you're purchasing or updating your insurance. In the event of a claim, we make sure you are treated fairly by all concerned.

## Accessible

As an independent business located in your community, we will meet with you in person to understand your specific and personal requirements.

## Choices, Confidentiality and Peace of Mind are all Yours!

We maintain the highest professional standards and are committed to keeping all of your information in the strictest confidence.

We're proud to be your independent insurance broker. Thank you for choosing us.

# Is your Oil Heated Property Insurable?

It only takes one litre of fuel oil to contaminate one million litres of water to the point that it is unsafe to drink. It's no wonder oil tanks have become a major concern for insurers, fuel companies and property owners.

Like most metal products, oil tanks will deteriorate over time. They develop small pinholes that lead to leaks. Fuel lines and filler pipes can also crack or break causing leaks.

A leaking oil tank poses a serious health threat to you and your family. Fuel oil contains benzene, a known carcinogen. If you detect a fuel oil odor or leak, determine the source immediately and contact your heating contractor. Don't delay. Prolonged exposure may cause you to become desensitized to its distinctive odor.

Although any oil tank can leak, most spills originate from oil tanks that are 15 years of age or older. New requirements were introduced in October 2001 to reduce the number of fuel oil leaks and spills that occur throughout Ontario each year.

Owners of fuel oil heating systems are now required to have their heating systems inspected by qualified oil burner technicians. This includes all underground and above-ground tanks, associated piping, and venting and heating appliances such as furnaces, boilers and water heaters.

The regulations now require all underground or buried fuel oil tanks

to be registered with the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA).

If you own a buried fuel oil tank, it must be upgraded with leak and spill-protection equipment or be removed. The regulations include a phased-in, multi-year program to upgrade or remove existing underground tanks depending on when it was installed.

Date Installed	Action Required
25 or more years ago?	the tank must be upgraded or removed by October 1, 2006
20 to 24 years ago?	the tank must be upgraded or removed by October 1, 2007
10 to 19 years ago?	the tank must be upgraded or removed by October 1, 2008
Less than a year to 9 years ago?	the tank must be upgraded or removed by October 1, 2009

To register your underground tank and find out more about the new inspection requirements, call TSSA's Fuels Safety program toll-free at 1-877-682-TSSA (8772) or visit TSSA's web site at [www.tssa.org](http://www.tssa.org)

If you heat with oil, please take preventative measures to protect your home, family and the environment.

- if you see or smell any oil, contact your heating contractor immediately
- make sure your tank is ULC (Underwriters Laboratories of Canada) approved
- you should replace any tank that is 15 years old or older
- never buy or install a used oil tank

- fuel tanks should be located at least 100 feet from the nearest well
- tanks located near driveways should be protected by concrete posts
- fuel tanks should always rest on a solid, non-combustible, level surface (not on wood or raised on stacked blocks)

Not all insurance policies protect against the peril of fuel leakage. If you heat with oil, check with us to see if you are covered.



We're proud to be Members of the Insurance Brokers Association of Ontario