

Insights and Updates



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New Jersey texting laws

You know it is forbidden, but sometimes it's so hard to resist. You hear that chime from your pocket or the cup holder and you want to look. You know you shouldn't but what if it's something important, like breaking news on the status of your fantasy football running back or an update on what that person you kind of knew in high school is having for lunch. You can't resist: You reach for your cell phone and seconds later you see flashing lights in your rearview mirror.

The temptations are so great and New Jersey knows that. That is why New Jersey has become one of the many states to enact legislation making it illegal to text (or use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) and drive.

It is illegal to text while driving in New Jersey. Recently, the penalties for being found texting and driving were increased. If people are found guilty of texting while driving, they can face a fine ranging from \$200 to \$800, depending on the frequency of the offense.

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In addition, drivers will be assessed three points to their driving record and they could have their license suspended for 90-days, if they are found guilty of a third texting while driving offense.

Older drivers have a greater presence on the road

A recent article in the *Washington Post* took a look at U.S. Census data and noted the number of licensed drivers over the age of 65 increased 29 percent from 2003 to 2013. In fact, the article said, older drivers have outpaced millennials, who have dropped out of the driving force by 3 percent in the same time frame.

“Nearly 3.5 million U.S. drivers are over the age of 84, which is a 43 percent increase over the last decade.”¹

Senior health overall is improving and auto technology; such as brake assist, navigation systems, power steering and better lighting, helps drivers deal with the challenges aging presents, so the number of mature, responsible drivers is on the rise.

But, there comes a time for everyone to face that it may be time to give up the wheel. This is a difficult decision that is as unique as you and your family. The National Institute on Aging suggests asking yourself these questions if you think it may be time for you:

- Do other drivers often honk at me?
- Have I had some accidents, even if they were only fender benders?
- Do I get lost, even on roads I know?
- Do cars or people walking seem to appear out of nowhere?
- Do I get distracted while driving?
- Have family, friends or my doctor said they're worried about my driving?
- Am I driving less these days because I'm not as sure about my driving as I used to be?

- Do I have trouble staying in my lane?
- Do I have trouble moving my foot between the gas and the brake pedals, or do I sometimes confuse the two?
- Have I been pulled over by a police officer about my driving?

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, it may be time to talk with your doctor about driving or have a driving assessment.

If you come to the conclusion that it's time to let someone else take over driving, let our agency know. There's an upside to relinquishing your license, and a brake on your insurance is part of it.

¹ *Washington Post*, Aug. 13, 2015





We know you want your home insured fully

Wouldn't it be nice to buy a homeowners policy that would guarantee replacement of your home in the event of a loss without any conditions? That concept may be appealing, but it's not realistic. In order to charge the appropriate rate, the insurer would need to hire an appraiser to estimate the home's replacement cost and determine what additional expenses would be necessary to bring the new home up to current building codes. This would have to include an estimate for the anticipated local inflation of materials and labor following a catastrophe loss, should that be involved. Then the insurer would need to update the insured value every year. While nothing prevents an insurer from doing this, it would make it difficult to market a policy having a significantly higher premium than its competitors.

Until some insurer decides to take responsibility for these expenses, assurance of the complete replacement of your home following a loss is going to depend on the effort you make to get accurate estimates, along with the expenses you are willing to assume. There are three steps to getting it right:

- First, you need a limit for current replacement cost based upon an appraiser's or general contractor's determination of your specific home as it exists today.

“... assurance of the complete replacement of your home following a loss is going to depend on the effort you make to get accurate estimates, along with the expenses you are willing to assume.”

- Second, you need a limit of insurance for the additional costs incurred to bring your home up to current building codes from its original construction. You also need to consider the potential for having to rebuild the entire home if it is substantially damaged according to code.

- Third, you need to estimate what percentage building costs may rise in the event demand for materials and services are elevated following a catastrophic event.

Our agency is not a licensed appraiser of property, so we can only quote basic costs per square foot using estimators provided by the insurer or other online resources. Another option is to ask a local contractor in the area what the correct cost per square foot is for the type of home you own. Remember, the replacement cost of your home is likely to be different from the market value, as that amount includes the lot size, location, age, aesthetics, neighborhood, economy and expected local development.

We recommend that you make the best determination you can for each of the three categories above and add a little cushion for error. Please call us for assistance in placing appropriate limits on your policy.



Don't get bungled by burglars



While the FBI estimates that a burglary occurs every 14.6 seconds (according to 2010 statistics), there are actions you can take so your home is less likely to become a statistic.

First, do you have the proper insurance protection? You should review your homeowners insurance policy to make sure that any “big-ticket” items you may have purchased since you bought your policy are fully covered for theft and other losses. Second, make a record of all the serial numbers of your electronic devices and take photographs as well. This will aid the police and your insurance company if your property is stolen. Finally, do you have a professionally installed burglar alarm system? Not only will an alarm system make a burglar think twice about breaking into your home, but many insurance companies offer a discount on homeowners policies if your home is equipped with an alarm.

Other helpful tips include: maintaining the shrubs in your yard so they are less than three feet high in the front and sides of your home; securing all your doors with deadbolt locks; setting a few lights in your home on timers (make sure they are set to go on and off at different times); and positioning your valuable possessions (e.g., televisions, stereos) so they cannot be seen when a person looks in the window.

If you have any questions about your homeowners insurance policy, give us a call. We are more than happy to answer your questions. Securing your home allows you to create a stress-free environment in which all your possessions are protected. However, should you become the victim of a burglary, contact us as soon as possible and we will help you through the claims process to replace your property.

News from our agency

Protect your belongings on vacation

A vacation is a time to relax, and enjoy the time off. There are some preparations to consider before leaving and steps to take once you arrive. To ensure you have a pleasant experience, plan ahead by following these tips:

1. Avoid bringing large amounts of cash. Use credit cards or travelers' checks. If you must bring cash, inside pockets and shoulder bags across the chest are the best places to keep it.
2. Label each piece of luggage, inside and out, with your name, address and telephone number. Use a business address and phone number on the outside tag so no one knows your home is unoccupied.
3. Leave valuables in the hotel safe.
4. Don't give any personal information over the phone. If you receive a call from the front desk requesting verification of your credit card number, tend to it in person.
5. Leave the “Do Not Disturb” sign on your door when you leave the room, so others think it's occupied.
6. Carry all valuables, medicines and papers with you. Do not put them in the checked luggage.

Some homeowners and renters policies protect your belongings in case of theft. If you want to ensure you have the proper coverage, call us. We can help. With the necessary coverage, you can spend your vacation time truly relaxing.