



Paul Brouwers'

Circle of Safety™

Your Consumer Awareness Advisor™

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Do Cut-Price Homes = Cheaper Insurance?

Tumbling house prices may have you wondering whether homeowners' insurance premiums will fall too.

Fair question. But the answer is not as straightforward as you might think. Although median house prices in the US are down around 7% year on year, don't expect to be able to cut your premiums by the same amount.

For a start, your homeowners' policy covers a lot more than your structure. It probably also covers contents – and the value of those is more likely to have gone up than down – and third party liability.

But the most critical factor in evaluating your coverage is that the buildings element of your policy should not be based purely on the market value of your home but more importantly on the cost of reconstructing it.

Although these are hard times for builders, there's no real evidence that construction costs have fallen. In fact, industry experts reckon that as many as two thirds of American homes may be undervalued for rebuilding purposes.

That means it makes sense, one way or the other, to regularly check that your homeowners' policy accurately reflects the cost of rebuilding it. There are several ways:

- Many insurers keep records on rebuilding costs and automatically adjust policies to reflect changes.
- Talk to us. Insurance agents have their finger on the pulse and know how to get the information you need.
- There are a number of online calculators which claim to be able to produce accurate figures. If you use these, you're best to crosscheck between several. Beware: some of them charge for the service.
- You can ask a builder to do a walk-through with you and estimate the reconstruction cost.
- You can pay an appraiser to do a full inspection.

Bottom line: lower real estate values are unlikely to offer much opportunity to cut your homeowners' premium, though there are other ways to tackle this, such as agreeing to pay a higher deductible or using the same insurer for auto as well as property cover.

Again, please talk to us about this.

IN THIS ISSUE: • **Coupons Save You a Fortune** • **Keep Track of Home Rebuilding Costs** • **How to Make Your Home Safer** • **Simple Rules for Keeping Fit** • **Get Organized & Simplify Your Life**

SAVE BIG TIME WITH COUPON POWER!

When every penny counts, you can dig up a small fortune with a pair of scissors and a few mouse clicks.

Every year, retailers and manufacturers plow billions of dollars into money saving coupons. Yet, in the past, most of us ignored them or threw them away.

The economic downturn, however, has changed all that and, with a sharp eye and a little planning, you could make some big time savings. Expert couponers claim to hack up to 25% off their grocery bills.

The key is to be organized. Get yourself a concertina-type file so you can store coupons by expiry date.

Then quickly flick through those flyers in your Sunday newspaper and your mailbox clipping out the coupons.

DON'T clip coupons for stuff you don't normally use but DO look for acceptable alternatives for your usual purchases.

Online, too, you'll find lots of great coupon sites where you can sign up for regular offer. Do a Google search or visit www.coupons.com. But beware of scams. Never pay for a coupon.

NSACE
National Society of Agents for
Consumer Education

Are you *Client of the Month*? See Page 3

Every Home Should Have One

Essentials protect you & your family

It couldn't happen to you, could it? Wrong! It's almost a dead cert that at some time in your life, you or a member of your family will be injured or put at risk at home.

But whether it's a hammer thwack on your thumb or a blaze in the dead of night (we hope not!) you can reduce the pain or possibility of more serious trouble with the Boy Scout motto: **Be prepared.**

Here's a list of the Top 10 things you need to make your home a safer place to live:

1. A first aid kit. They cost a few dollars and should be regularly checked to replenish supplies and replace outdated stuff.
2. A hallway smoke/fire detector on each story of your home and in the kitchen. Test, and check batteries regularly.
3. Strategically placed fire extinguishers, regularly checked and replaced when outdated. Know the different types needed for, say, kitchen fires versus electrical fires.
4. Carbon monoxide detector if you burn gas. Again, check regularly.
5. An easily accessible list of emergency phone numbers. Preferably also store them in your phone.
6. Safety goggles and gloves for when you're working with items that could damage your eyes or skin.
7. A flashlight. Consider a rechargeable one that doubles as a night light and is always accessible and ready for use.
8. Regular checks and immediate repairs to any potential hazard – like burned out lightbulbs and loose carpeting or floorboards.
9. Portable gates that prevent children or pets from going where they shouldn't – like into the kitchen or upstairs.
10. An escape ladder in a two or more story home. Every family member should be able to escape via a window in emergency.

And here's a bonus tip: What do you know about your neighbors' skills? For instance, knowing who's a first aider or an electrician could save your life. Find out now!

Baby Beware: Everyday Products That Pose Dangers

Most homes contain an array of potentially dangerous products, warns Debra Holtzman, author of "The Safe Baby: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Home Safety and Healthy Living" (Sentient Publications). For example, table salt can damage a toddler's central nervous system, swallowed baby oil can cause pneumonia, alcohol (even in perfumes and mouthwash) may spark seizures, while chocolate can be toxic for pets. Cheap jewelry, as well as being a choking hazard, may contain lead, while common houseplants contain crystals that cause extreme pain and inflammation if the leaves are chewed. "Fortunately, accidental poisoning is a preventable injury. But it's up to parents, grandparents and caregivers to be educated about what can be harmful to children and pets," says Holtzman.

B.Z. Toons

by Brian Zaikowski



Oh yes, please!

The Dos and Don'ts of Keeping Fit

Did you stick with your resolution to get fit for 2010? Or maybe you're starting to think about this year's vacation and last year's shorts. Can they work together? Is it time to mount the treadmill or reactivate gym membership? How much exercise you need depends on two key factors – your age and your general state of health. Obviously, you should always seek medical advice before launching an exercise regime, but a few general tips can help most of us:

Be regular: Frequent, steady exercise is better than occasional intensive bursts. An hour's walk, 4 days a week is a guideline for a healthy person.

Be calm: Workouts don't need to be – indeed shouldn't be in some cases – strenuous or exhausting. Just keep moving.

Be comfortable: Don't wear tight clothing or footwear and don't exercise immediately after eating; a stroll may be okay.

Be aware: Measure your performance and monitor your body. Using a pedometer and wearing a heart monitor can help you stay within limits.

Following these simple rules can help you get fit and stay there – without overdoing it.

Bring on the shorts!

Thank You For Referrals

Thank You! Thank You!

Thanks to all our clients who graciously referred their family, friends and associates to our agency. We build our agency on your positive comments. We couldn't do it without your help! These nice folks received a \$5 Speedy Cash Gift Card just for referring our agency to their friends.

John Boersma, Steve Reeves, Jeffrey Robinson; Carlton Adams



Are You Our Client of the Month?

Our agency is nothing without your loyalty and faith in us. Even if your name doesn't appear below this month, please accept my heartfelt thanks for your support. I truly appreciate it!

For outstanding work telling others about our agency, this month we honor:

John Boersma

as our Client of the Month!

John will receive a \$25 dining certificate to Chili's. Thanks

for your continued business!

Congratulations!

This month we congratulate one of our own. Mike Brouwers was awarded his CIC designation after many months of classes and difficult exams. CIC stands for "Certified Insurance Counselor" and is a highly sought after designation in our industry. It means that Mike has gained expertise in Property, Casualty, Business, Life and Health insurance as well as Agency Management.

Mike will be getting his CIC at a ceremony at the Michigan Association of Insurance Agents annual convention in Grand Rapids on February 24.

And, while we're on the subject of congratulations for Mike, Congrats to him for getting another prestigious recognition. He was elected to the Board of the Young Agent's Council of The Michigan Association of Independent Agents. So now he will be spending some time in Lansing helping our industry to grow and improve and to help our customers get the best coverages available.

If you get a chance, send Mike and E-mail, and congratulate him yourself.

New Addition

The Brouwers Agency is proud to welcome SAFECO into our agency. Safeco is a national insurance carrier providing home, auto, rental dwelling, umbrella, and many other personal lines coverages.

We look forward to representing SAFECO and we know our customers appreciate our continued search for companies with excellent coverages and service at an affordable price.

If we haven't had a chance to give you a proposal on your personal lines insurance recently, give us a call and let us work on it.

Safeco InsuranceTM

Member of Liberty Mutual Group

Tell Others About Us and Win a Prize

Who will be our next Client of the Month? Could it be you?

Referrals are the lifeblood of any business, and there's no better source than you, our clients.

Just mention The Brouwers Agency to a friend, relative, or colleague and have them give us a call at 866 359-0970. Don't forget to tell them to use your name, so we can enter you for our prize draw! Thank you in advance.

*Thanks- I am extremely happy with your services. It is much better than what I had before, and less expensive!
-S. Miller , Grand Rapids*

Get Organized – De-clutter and Simplify Your Life

If you've ever watched one of those TV shows in which celebrities help some poor victim clear out a lifetime of clutter stored in every possible corner of their home, perhaps you've found yourself wishing Oprah, Dr Phil or whoever would turn up at your front door with a team of clean sweepers. But even without them, a few simple steps can help you reclaim your space – and your life – even if your clutter is not quite at the level that calls for an extreme home makeover. Here are some tips to get you started:

- Avoid being overwhelmed – tackle just one room or even one corner of a room at a time.
- Create a written schedule of what you're going to do and when, allowing plenty of time – and stick to it.
- Use black plastic sacks – one for garbage and one for stuff you can give away. That way, you can't see them and have second thoughts! Never look inside them.
- Don't talk yourself into keeping things you don't need. Give them away to a charity and let yourself feel good about it.
- (OK, allow yourself to select and keep just one "favorite" from each room).
- For stuff that you do need ("need", note, not "want") use a storage system with labeled drawers. Don't just stack boxes that will become dauntingly inaccessible.
- If you're really struggling and have friends in the same boat, form a self-help group who'll work together in each others' homes.
- There are online support groups too. Search for "de-clutter help groups"
- Prepare to feel liberated!!!

A message for your Valentine :

*When I am with you, we stay up all night. When you're not here, I can't go to sleep.
Praise God for those two insomnias! And the difference between them.*

- Jalal ad-Din Rumi

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