

Toys in the Attic

More than just an Aerosmith song, toys in the attic—and in every other nook and cranny in the house—is a November/December phenomenon in America. And the toys are not just a truck for Johnny and a dolly for Sue. Americans' toys are made by Garmin and Apple and Rolex, among other big names, and they are worth billions.

Your homeowners insurance will likely cover your purchases if they are stolen or damaged before they are distributed, but if you are given jewelry or art and it is stolen

or damaged, you might encounter problems with your claim, especially if your policy excludes those items from standard

coverage. For any high-priced specialty items not covered on your standard home policy, take pictures, keep receipts and store the item and its documentation safely and separately from each other.

Also, call us with information on any high-ticket items that aren't covered by your policy as soon as

you buy them so we can assist you with additional coverage if you need it. ■



Thieves' Favorite Cars

The National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) has released its 2008 "Hot Wheels" study.

Although vehicle theft is down, some cars are still highly attractive to thieves. According to the "Hot Wheels" study, the most stolen cars last year, in order, were:

1. 1995 Honda Civic
2. 1991 Honda Accord
3. 1989 Toyota Camry
4. 1997 Ford F-Series Pickup
5. 1994 Chevrolet C/K 1500 Pickup

6. 1994 Acura Integra
7. 2004 Dodge Ram Pickup
8. 1994 Nissan Sentra
9. 1988 Toyota Pickup
10. 2007 Toyota Corolla

Older model vehicles are a target for thieves because of a thriving market for parts. Practice auto-theft deterrence by always locking parked vehicles and by installing anti-theft devices, such as alarms, steering wheel locks, and vehicle tracer systems. ■

Insurance and Investment Scams Target Seniors

Seniors Against Investment Fraud (SAIF), along with the Iowa Insurance Division, warn consumers of some of the more common financial scams that lead eager investors of all ages astray.

Promissory Notes

These are short-term debt instruments, such as loans from the investor to a company. The promise is a low risk, high rate of return. The problem is that the notes are often “guaranteed” by little-known or non-existent companies. Those that do exist are often not licensed to do business in the U.S. There is no assurance that investors will get their money back, let alone a profit.

Investment Seminars

These free consultations focus on estate planning, living trusts, retire-



ment investing and other financial schemes. They are geared toward establishing a trusting relationship between the client and the sales agent and frequently result in the purchase of a financial or invest-

ment product that is unsuitable or unlicensed.

Annuity Sales

Annuities are investments that pay out an annual sum based on previous payments. While these are often legitimate and suitable, there can be hidden, costly surrender charges and management fees that can eat away at expected returns. Dealing with a reputable agent is critical.

Scams lead to lost income and emotional distress and are a common source of identity theft. What’s worse, because participation in them is voluntary, lost income is likely not covered by home or identity theft insurance. Working with high-quality agents like those on our service team is your best option. ■

Pest Damage to Your Home

Bugs, mice and other vermin are annoying and destructive (hence the name “pest”).

Unfortunately, where they cause the most significant damage is to your wallet. Pests cause millions of dollars of damage to homes each year across the U.S. in all 50 states. Prevention is the only way to avoid the large and inevitable repair bill down the road.

Some homeowners policies will cover some damage by some critters, but many home insurance policies will pay to repair or replace pest damage only in very limited situations, such as when infestation results from another covered cause of loss (e.g., a windstorm blows the

roof off an evacuated home and pests barge in).

Home insurance is not designed to cover losses resulting from a lack of maintenance or neglect.



Therefore, it is important that homeowners not rely on their home insurance to prevent or pay for damage. Homeowners interested in learning about

ways to avoid costly pest damage can visit the website of the Ohio Pest Control Association: www.ohiopca.com/consumer.php. Homeowners can also visit their state’s department of agriculture for more information on pests and pest control professionals.

If your home is vulnerable to squirrels, mice, woodpeckers and other vermin and you are concerned about damage while your home is unattended, particularly if you spend the winter months away, call our service team. We can help you understand what your current policy covers and what options you have for insuring against pest damage. ■

Driving in the Snow

The number one tip for driving in extreme winter conditions: “Stay off the road.” If that option is not realistic, consider the following tips from AAA:

- If possible, avoid applying extra gas when going up a hill. Try to get momentum first and let it carry you up. As you reach the top, slow down and descend slowly.

- On a hill, keep moving. If possible, don’t brake on a hill unless you come to a stop sign or light. If you must stop, tread tentatively. “The worst thing to do is step on the gas and break traction,” says Lon Anderson, director of public and government affairs at AAA Mid-Atlantic. “You don’t want to start by spinning. The best hope for getting going is a very, very slow and gentle beginning.” If the wheels keep spinning, the only option is to reverse back downhill and gain traction on level ground. This may not always be possible—that’s why the only foolproof solution is to find an alternate route.



- Monitor tire tread and inflation. Balding or irregular tires add to traction and control problems. If you live in a particularly snowy area, add chains to your tire preparation list.

- Pack that snowbrush and ice scraper. If this seems too obvious to mention, look around at some of the things people use for scraping ice off their windshield. Also fill and

routinely check your windshield fluid. Icy buildup and spray from slushy or treated roads can be a real blinder.

- Practice! Next time it snows, find an empty parking lot and test how your vehicle handles.

Remember to check the owner’s manual. It can be an excellent resource for information on driving in extreme conditions. ■

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Special Insurance for Special Cars

Vintage. Exotic. Just plain hot. Exotic cars (Bentley, Aston Martin, Ferrari to name a few) are usually not adequately covered by standard auto insurance. The same goes for “classic” (collector vehicles that are at least 20 years older than the current model year) and “antique” (25 years or older) cars. Further, if the vehicle is customized in any way, damage to the custom equipment might not be covered either.

These special cars need special insurance. Affordable policies are available. Call our service team for more information. ■

Thank you for your referrals.

If you're pleased with us, spread the word! We will be happy to give the same great service to all of your friends and business associates.