

Survival in Car-SUV Crashes

A new study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reveals that cars are protecting occupants better in crashes with sport-utility vehicles and pick-up trucks—even though “light trucks” have grown into bigger, heavier machines.

For cars that collided with mid-weight SUVs, the death rate fell by 39% (or 42 deaths for each one million registered SUVs between 2000 to 2003). A decade earlier, the rate was 69 deaths for each one million registered SUVs. The death-rate decline was not as pronounced in collisions with “heavier SUVs.”



What has helped increase safety? New technology and greater use of seat belts, for the most part. Some 80% of drivers now use seat belts, compared with only 50% in 1990.

Bob Lange, safety chief at General Motors Corp., explains that auto safety “is a shared responsibility between us and the driving public. Until we get everybody buckling up on every trip, we will still see far too many deaths and injuries on the nation’s roads.”

Please wear your seat-belt. And if you have any questions about your car insurance, give us a call. We’d be glad to help. ■

The High-End Renovation Buzz

Home-improvement shows are clogging the networks. You might say that it’s a new fad brought on by the fact that the Generation X populace now has more economic freedom than they did when they were working at the record store in 1986. Throw in their natural inclination toward creativity and the equation is complete. The bottom line: more and more homeowners are investing in remodeling, renovation, and home-repair projects.

U.S. homeowners spent \$176 billion on remodeling and repair projects in 2003, according to a report by Harvard University’s Joint

Center for Housing Studies. And rental property owners spent \$57 billion in the same year.

Interestingly enough, the most popular home-improvement projects were of the high-end type: “major” remodeling of a kitchen (at a cost of \$10,000 or more), for example, or adding an entire room.

Do you have any project plans bouncing around the kitchen table at dinnertime? Just make sure that you contact us before the contractor puts on the tool belt. We can help outfit you with the proper insurance coverage before embarking on that exciting home makeover. ■

Insuring Your Cardboard Treasure Chests

There are tools on the market that help simplify the valuation of a building. When insuring your home, these tools help determine how much insurance you need for your policy to pay claims in the way that you expect it to. Unfortunately, it's particularly difficult to determine the value of some types of personal property. Insurance coverage often reimburses you for a "like kind and quality" piece of property. But your definition of "like kind and quality" might vary significantly from that of the insurance company.

Suppose that there's no "like kind

and quality"? What if certain items in your home are so rare or valuable that their equivalent would be as hard to locate as a needle in a

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haystack? Is your attic filled with cardboard treasure chests, packed to the gills with collectible toys, baseball cards, stamps, coins, or other items that you decided just might be worth

something someday?

A major news publication recently ran a story about how the value of certain collectibles has outperformed the stock market by as much as 900%. With this level of appreciation possible, it's important for you to understand how to protect your investment in the event of a loss.

A member of our service team will be happy to help you determine your insurance needs for your most precious possessions. You might be surprised at what a great value this protection can be. Call us today. ■

The True Value of Your Home

Quick fact: The two most commonly cited sources of a home's value are usually useless for insurance purposes.

Most people base their perceived home value on a benchmark of the original purchase price, and then adjust it over time based on current home sales or tax assessments. But even realtors will tell you that such values are educated "guesstimates" subject to wide variation.

For example, "appraised value" is an estimate of what the property is worth in the current marketplace derived from an analysis of the home, the community where the home is located, and the recent sale

prices of similar homes in the area. "Assessed value" is determined by the local taxing authority to levy taxes. (Note,



for instance, that although homeowners insurance isn't covering the value of your land,

the tax assessor is figuring that value into the equation.) To confuse the issue further, state and local laws and regulations often require capping or discounting taxable assessments far below the full assessed value determined by the authority.

If your home is severely damaged or destroyed, the true value you need to know is the cost to rebuild it, not what it might sell for or its tax assessment. Too many people have made the mistake of relying on assessed or appraised values to determine whether they have enough homeowners insurance—only to find that their coverage fell far short of true construction costs. ■

Protect Your Personal Information

Some crooks specialize in swiping identities, leaving their victims to reel in a whirlwind of confusion, steep costs, and embarrassment. What makes you think you're so safe? Is it because you put your wallet in your front pocket? Or because you tear up any receipts and toss them in the trash? The chances are that you don't practice most of the safety precautions you should be taking.

The Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov) provides these guidelines for safeguarding your personal information:

- Because your credit card account might be a potential target, take the time to review your credit report regularly. You'll quickly see if anyone has been tampering with your assets.
- Passwords provide a firewall of sorts. Create and assign passwords to your credit card, bank, and phone accounts.
- Make sure that any personal information isn't lying out in the



open in your home. Secure or hide it. If you have a roommate, be especially careful.

- Know what information security your workplace provides.
- Refrain from giving out personal information over the phone, through mail, or on the Internet unless you established the contact in the first place. Know who you're dealing with.
- Never carry your Social Security card on your person. Leave it in a safe place. ■

Driving in the Rain

It's no surprise that traffic accidents occur in greater numbers during wet weather. And since accidents can lead to loss of life, injury, inconvenience, and damaged morale, it's important to answer these questions:

- Are you familiar with your vehicle's braking system (e.g., antilock) and how to operate it when driving in rainy conditions?
- Are you aware of the tread level on your tires and how it might affect your vehicle's tendency to slide on slippery roads?
- Did you know that frequent use of cruise control might increase your vehicle's probability of hydroplaning?

We want you to be a safe driver. For more information, and to discuss your personal auto insurance options, call us today. ■

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Water-Damage Woes

You're not going to believe this: Of all the appliances in your home, water heaters and washing machines are the most likely to cause serious damage.

Some 10% of water-damage claims can be blamed on a malfunctioning hot water tank or washing machine, according to a nationwide analysis by SAFECO Insurance. "Water is the most common cause of home damage today—even more likely than fire," said Jim Swegle, a SAFECO vice president.

"Americans are spending twice what they were 10 years ago to repair water damage," added Swegle. "In most cases, homeowners can save themselves a lot of time and money by adding a few simple protective devices and doing routine maintenance. These tasks usually take just a few minutes and the parts often cost less than \$20."

Let's talk about your homeowners insurance—it's probably time for a check-up anyway—and how it would help you deal with water damage from home appliances. Contact our professional service team at your convenience. ■

For more information about your home, auto or personal liability insurance, fill out this form and submit it.

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.