



**INTERWEST**  
INSURANCE SERVICES, LLC

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## NEWSBLAST

### Seasonal Safety

# Protect Your Home and Identity This Holiday Season

**H**OME BREAK-INS increase dramatically during the holiday season. Thieves expect people to be shopping for new toys and electronics and stashing them in the house. Not only that, but cyber criminals also up their game during December, increasing your risk of identity or credit card theft.

Whether you do your shopping online or in the stores, it's important to remember these basic safety tips to protect yourself against holiday season theft.

#### Protect your home while out

**Lock everything** – Many burglars get into homes just because a door or window was left open or unlocked.

**Secure valuables** – Never leave anything of value out in plain sight. Consider placing any jewelry, extra cash or other valuables in a safe deposit box or even a secure hidden safe within the house. Remember one of the first places burglars look is the master bedroom.

**Leave the light on** – The more it looks like someone is home, the less likely that someone will try to break into your home. If you're going to be gone for more than a day, buy a timer for your lights so they come on at various times during the evening and turn off in the morning.

**Activate your alarm system** – Don't forget to arm your security system — this simple step will go a long way to protecting your home.

### Protect Your Identity

To avoid having your personally identifiable information stolen:

- Invest in identity protection software. There are many services that range in their coverage of protection of your personal information.
- Don't click on links in e-mails from sources you don't know. Also beware of bogus e-mails that look like they come from legitimate sources, like your bank. If you're unsure don't click and instead go to your bank's website to log in.
- Use a credit card instead of a debit card. You can often dispute charges you didn't make on a credit card and you won't be liable for them.
- Verify that shopping websites use encrypted payment forms, such as a secure socket layer (or SSL).

### The takeaway

Taking the above steps can reduce the chances of your home being burglarized or your identity stolen. Even if you have insurance, dealing with a theft is something you want to avoid. ❖



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## Buying a Home

# More Offers Include Insurance Contingency Clauses

**I**F YOU ARE in the market for a new home in a state at high risk for natural catastrophes, you can save yourself time, stress and a headache if you start planning for home insurance before you place a bid. Gone are the days of calling up an insurer a few days before escrow closes.

Prospective homebuyers in California are increasingly having to retract offers on homes because they are unable to find affordable homeowner's insurance coverage as more carriers have withdrawn from these markets, or have raised rates dramatically.

Insurers are pulling back due to increasing wildfire threat in terms of scope and damage, spiraling claims costs and their inability to get their rate increase filings with the Department of Insurance approved in a timely manner.

As well, insurance companies buy their own insurance called reinsurance, and those companies are also pulling back from covering insurers who cover homes in the state.

The result has been skyrocketing premium increases and for buyers in some areas exposed to wildfire, the costs are more than they can handle.

A recent survey by the California Association of Realtors found that 14% of realtors in the state said that they'd had a home sale fall through in 2024 due to the buyer having difficulty in securing affordable homeowner's coverage. That's compared with 6% in the year prior.

### Homebuyer options

The association recently added an insurance contingency clause to a template that its 200,000 members may use when making an offer on a home for a client.

If the buyer is unable to find "affordable" coverage, the clause allows them to rescind their offer or renegotiate without losing a good-faith deposit, which can be between 1% and 3% of the loan.

### Default language

Terms of an insurance contingency can be negotiated, however default language states that:

- The purchase is contingent on whether the cost of insurance is "acceptable," and
- If the buyer is unable to find insurance within a set period of time (usually 17 days), they must cancel the contract or move forward anyway.

### A final word

If you're in the market for a home in California with its difficult insurance market, you'll need to plan ahead for purchasing insurance. You can call us when you decide to put an offer on a home to ensure you can secure coverage that's within your budget.

We know this is a lot to digest. If you have questions, call us anytime. ❖





## Underinsurance Risk

# If Upgrading Your Home, Update Your Coverage



**W**ITH FEWER homeowners willing to sell and buy a new home in this high-mortgage-rate environment, many are instead plowing money into their homes. However, they are often failing to update their homeowner's insurance property limits to reflect the upgrades, a new report has found.

According to Nationwide Mutual Insurance's "Homeowners Survey," 51% of homeowners have completed a major home renovation project within the past two years and, after completing the work, 55% had not adjusted their insurance policies, leaving themselves at risk of being underinsured.

If that happens, the insurance policy limits may not be enough to cover major repairs or the cost of rebuilding.

In such cases, the homeowner would have to pay out of pocket for the difference.

### Empty nesters are big spenders

Project type	Average homeowner	Empty nesters
<b>Kitchen remodels:</b>	\$9,702	\$18,672.
<b>Full home renovations:</b>	\$36,900	\$90,000.
<b>Window replacements:</b>	\$4,917	\$15,375.

"Unfortunately, our research shows that homeowners often overlook necessary policy adjustments after significant renovations, potentially leaving them underinsured in the event of a catastrophe," said Casey Kempton, Nationwide's president of P&C Personal Lines. "Every homeowner should review their home insurance coverage with their independent insurance agent regularly to avoid potential gaps."

### Hidden danger: Doing it yourself

Many homeowners are opting to do the work themselves.

### Common do-it-yourself projects

- Basement renovations
- Front door replacements
- Bathroom remodels
- Kitchen remodel
- Full-home remodel/"gut" renovation
- Home addition (such as an additional room, a room expansion, separate garage)

Nearly two in five homeowners have taken on improvement projects that are typically reserved for experts — like a kitchen remodel — themselves due to the high cost of hiring a contractor.

High contractor costs were cited as a challenge by 75% of respondents and more than half had some trouble finding a contractor, also spurring them to take on projects themselves.

However, there is a risk for do-it-yourselfers: Their work could result in safety problems and compromise the home's insurability, the report says. For example, mistakes like uneven surfaces could cause someone to trip.

### The takeaway

Contact us to review your insurance policy before starting any major renovation. It will be important to get all the facts to ensure that your coverage limits reflect the upgrades as well as today's rebuilding costs, which have been on the rise.

As well, if you are planning to do the work yourself, you'll also want to ensure that all potential risks are covered. ❖

## Driving Tips

# How to Stay Safe on the Road this Winter

**T**HOUSANDS OF people are injured or killed every winter because of overconfidence or unpreparedness while driving in dangerous conditions.

It is important for everyone to keep safety in mind while driving in wintry conditions, which can bring with them slippery roads, poor visibility and unpredictable drivers.

Driving in snow, sleet and rain can be perilous, but understanding how to drive in these conditions can help save lives and reduce the chances of an accident.

Here's how you can tackle winter driving with ease.

### At the start of the season:

- Make sure the vehicle has enough antifreeze and windshield washer fluid.
- Check the tread on the tires to be sure it is thick enough.
- Put a blanket, first aid kit, dry food, clothes and a gallon of water in the car.
- Carry emergency or repair equipment, including flashlights, flares, fire extinguisher, jumper cables, shovel, snow brush and ice scraper.
- Also carry several extra flashlight

### Driving tips

**Proceed slowly** – Always drive slowly when the roads may be icy or wet. Speeding is the main cause of accidents during the winter. Remember that having a four-wheel-drive vehicle does not make it safer to drive faster on ice.

Do not accelerate suddenly or change lanes unnecessarily.

**Don't tailgate** – Stay at least three to five car lengths behind the driver ahead. Tailgating can lead to accidents, especially in stop-and-go traffic that is moving slowly on slick roads.

**Don't use cruise control** – This is another important tip to remember. When cruise control is activated and the car hits a slick spot on the road, it will cause the wheels to spin and the vehicle to speed up. This can cause the vehicle to go off the road or crash into another one. It is best to simply turn off cruise control in the winter.

**Watch out for black ice** – Learn how to identify black ice, which is thin and virtually invisible on asphalt and often resembles a puddle of water.

There are signs that may indicate the presence of black ice, including shady spots, under bridges or on overpasses, ice build-up on the vehicle's mirrors and antenna, and frost on trees and road signs.

### How to navigate black ice

- If you start to slide, don't hit your brakes and don't panic.
- If you have front-wheel drive or rear-wheel drive with ABS and traction control, look for an open space and plan to travel in that direction. Accelerate just a little and steer gently in the direction of the open space.
- If you have a rear-wheel drive without ABS or traction control, head toward an open space, but instead of applying pressure to the accelerator, ease off and don't brake as you steer to the open space.

**Plan ahead** – Be sure to allow plenty of time to arrive at the destination and avoid speeding. If you are taking a longer trip, you should carry emergency or repair equipment, including flashlights, flares, fire extinguisher, jumper cables, snow chains, shovel, snow brush and ice scraper. Also, don't forget to carry a phone charger and non-perishable snacks.

You can also carry abrasive materials like sand, kitty litter and even extra floor mats that can be used for traction in snow or on ice if your vehicle gets stuck.

### The final piece

Besides understanding how to drive safely in winter conditions, accidents can still happen. That's why it's important that you carry auto insurance with liability limits that can pay for damage to any expensive automobile you may have crashed into, or to cover medical expenses of third parties if you are found at fault.







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# H A P P I E S T O F *Holidays*

from all of us at  
INTERWEST INSURANCE

2024 has proven to be both productive and purposeful for InterWest.

We're very proud of our accomplishments which are directly attributable to our trusted business partners, as well as our own valued, hard-working employees. And, once again we were successful in fulfilling our deeply rooted commitment to strengthening and enhancing our InterWest Gives Back Program which supports the communities we love and call home and enriches the lives of others through the selfless volunteering and generosity of our staff.

May the future reward us all with life's most meaningful treasures – love, happiness, as well as a little more sparkle & a little less stress. And, hoping that 2025 is filled with kindness, laughter, and a more peaceful world. We shine brighter together.

Our warmest wishes for a happy holiday season.

