

Insurance Checklist for the New Year

Are you Prepared for 2017?

Take time to review your policies and coverage

The start of a new year is a great time to reevaluate your insurance policies. Changing circumstances may lead to different insurance needs. Did you have a baby? Get married? Purchase a new home or car? If so, you'll want to check whether you have the right fit in policy protection.

Take some time to talk with your agent and review your policies and see if they meet your current needs. Your agent or company can help determine whether your current policies provide adequate coverage or if you might need more or less. Even if you haven't experienced a life changing event, you could be eligible for discounts or new insurance products may better serve your needs.

Life Insurance

Changes—such as a birth, divorce, remarriage or even a new mortgage or new job—are indicators that you might need to make changes to your life insurance policy, at the very least, that you should review your policy.

Read your policy carefully and answer these questions:

- Do premiums or benefits vary from year to year?
- How much do the benefits build up in the policy?
- What part of the premiums or benefits is not guaranteed?
- What is the effect of interest on money paid and received at different times on the policy?
- In what situations and through what procedures can you assess cash values?
- Can the policy be converted into another form of insurance or annuity?

In the case of the birth of a child or a new marriage, you might want to consider increasing your death benefit. Check with your agent to see if your insurance company requires a physical exam before increasing your coverage levels.

Alternatively, events like paying off your mortgage, retirement or children finishing college might mean that you can lower your life insurance coverage and premiums. Your life insurance company might be able to offer "conversion privileges" from your current term life insurance policy to a new whole life insurance policy. You might also be able to expand your death benefits so they can be used while you are still living. Ask your insurance agent or company about these options.

Homeowners/Rental Insurance

This is a great time to update your home inventory and make sure your homeowners or rental policy is up-to-date. Take some photos or video of your prized possessions. Remember to note any antique items and their value so you can talk with your insurance agent or insurance company to ensure that they are properly covered. If you need to create a home inventory, the National Association of Insurance Commissioners' (NAIC) free smartphone app, **myHOME Scr.APP.book**, takes some of the headache out of the process. Download the free app from iTunes or Google Play or the Department's paper version at doi.nebraska.gov/sites/doi.nebraska.gov/files/doc/home-inventory-checklist.pdf.

Remember to add any new gifts to your home inventory, too. Include as many details as you can and take a photo of each item. Most basic home insurance policies have standard limits for big-ticket items like electronics, art, jewelry or sporting equipment. You may need special coverage, so call your agent to discuss changes for your policy. Also consider your environment. Your home could be located in an area prone to flooding or earthquakes. These disasters can be costly, and may not be covered under a standard policy. Speak to your agent about possibly adding coverage for these perils.

Auto Insurance

Have you had any changes to your driving habits? If so, tell your agent to ensure your auto policy will cover you in case of an accident. Also take some time to check your auto insurance policy by following the guidelines below:

- Make sure your coverage is appropriate for your life situation. Liability is the part of the policy that pays for any injury or damage if you cause an accident. If your liability insurance is too low, it is possible that you could be sued for any damages above your liability limits.
- Review your deductibles for comprehensive and collision coverage. This is the amount you will pay if your car is damaged or totaled without fault of another driver. Raising or lowering this amount can affect your premium.
- Before hitting the road, make sure you have a copy of your insurance card and your insurance agent or company's number in your vehicle.
- It is a good idea to accurately record details of an accident if you are in one. The NAIC smartphone application **WreckCheck** walks you through the process of gathering information following an accident. You can then email your notes directly to your agent. Download the free app from iTunes or Google Play.

Health Insurance

You may have recently enrolled or changed your health insurance whether through your employer, Medicare or your state exchange. Make sure you have new insurance cards. Before you visit a doctor, verify that your paperwork is in order.

- Check your provider lists to make sure visits to your doctor and any specialists are still covered by your policy, as in-network or preferred provider lists change from year to year.
- Read through your documents and make note of copays for in-network and out-of-network providers so you are not surprised later.
- If you're planning a vacation away from home, check with your insurance carrier to identify urgent care centers and hospitals that accept your insurance coverage near your destination and along the way. Ask your carrier about applicable co-pays and deductibles if care is needed.

Protect Yourself

Insurance fraud can happen to anyone, anywhere. Protect yourself in 2017 and beyond by following the tips below:

- Don't give out any personal information—like your social security number or bank information—over the phone until you have verified the legitimacy of the insurance company and agent with your state insurance department.
- Ask for copies of everything you sign and keep a copy of the payment receipt or check for the initial premium payment you gave the agent for the policy.
- Call the insurance company if you don't receive a copy of the insurance policy outlining your coverage and its limitations within 30 days of your purchase.
- The best way to protect yourself from insurance fraud is to research the agent and company you're considering. Before writing your check or signing the contract, contact the Department of Insurance at 402-471-4913 to verify they are licensed in Nebraska.

More Information

For insurance-related concerns, you may contact the Nebraska Department of Insurance at 402-471-2201, on its toll-free consumer hotline at 1-877-564-7323, or visit its website at www.doi.nebraska.gov.