

the **ADVISOR**

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AVOID CONTRACTOR SCAMS AFTER A STORM

WHEN YOUR HOME IS DAMAGED DUE TO A STORM, IT IS A FRIGHTENING, STRESSFUL AND CONFUSING EXPERIENCE. YOU ARE DEALING WITH MAKING SURE YOUR FAMILY AND HOME ARE SAFE AND HOW TO BEGIN THE REBUILDING PROCESS.

Unfortunately, there are fraudulent contractors who will try to take advantage of you during this vulnerable time. To ensure you find a contractor who knows what he or she is doing and has a well established business, we encourage you to review the following:

- 1. Ask for references from homeowners who have projects similar to yours, and check them out.** If possible, interview the homeowner and visit a site with work in progress.
- 2. Take precautions if you live alone.** If possible, avoid letting the contractor know you live alone by having a family member or friend present at all times when you meet with them.

- 3. Ask for a copy of the contractor's current insurance certificates and licenses.** This will help separate the fraudulent contractors from the legitimate ones. Verify the potential contractor through the secretary of state's office in whatever state they're licensed to do business in. It is important that each worker is licensed and insured for workers' compensation, property damage and personal liability.

- 4. Check with the Better Business Bureau for any reports on the potential contractor in your state and surrounding states.**

This is especially important following large-scale natural disasters, when itinerant work crews often move into an area.

- 5. Interview several qualified registered contractors, and solicit formal bids based on exactly the same plans and specifications.**

- 6. Be wary of contractors who act in the following manner:**

- Provide credentials or references that can't be verified, such as not listing a business number in the telephone directory.
- Solicit their services door-to-door.
- Offer a special price only if you sign today or use other high-pressure sales techniques.
- Only accept cash, require large deposits or the entire costs up front, or ask you to make the payment in their name.
- Do not provide a written contract or complete bid.
- Ask you to pick up the building permit. In most instances, the contractor is required to take out the permits. Permits are your protection and help ensure that work will meet local building codes.
- Offer exceptionally long warranties.
- Want to do most or all of the work on weekends and after-hours.
- Provides you with an offer that sounds too good to be true.

For more information about hiring a contractor, visit the following websites:

Federal Trade Commission: www.ftc.com • National Association of Home Builders: www.nahb.com

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PROTECTING YOUR HOME AND REDUCING RISK, visit the Personal Lines Consumer Information and Safety Tips section on **GuideOne.com**.

TO REPORT A CLAIM, call the GuideLine® toll free at 1-888-748-4326 any time – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ANY OF THE FEATURES IN THE ADVISOR, contact your GuideOne agent, or call 1-888-218-8561 to locate an agent near you.

AVOID INADEQUATE COVERAGE: KNOW YOUR HOME INSURANCE POLICY

THE PHRASE "THAT'S NOT COVERED" IS NOT SOMETHING HOMEOWNERS WANT TO HEAR, ESPECIALLY IF AN EVENT, SUCH AS SEVERE STORM OR A ROBBERY OCCURS.

You can avoid these unwanted surprises by making sure your homeowners insurance policy has adequate coverage for your specific needs.

Understanding Homeowners Policy Numbers

Your homeowners policy number explains what type of coverage you have. Homeowners policies generally range from an HO-1 to an HO-6, with each one providing different coverage. GuideOne policies will show a GuideOne Homeowners (GHO) prefix followed by a form number. Review your policy and if you have question on what type of coverage you have and what it covers, contact your GuideOne agent.

Deciding Your Coverage Needs

Sixty-four percent of houses in the United States are not properly covered. And, of these properties, the average homeowner only has enough insurance to rebuild 81 percent of their home. Should an unfortunate event occur, the homeowners would be left to pay the difference.

This makes it critical to ensure your insurance policy is based on the costs of rebuilding your home, not just the price of your home. With the current economic times, the selling price of your home may be significantly different from the actual

costs of rebuilding. If your policy is not based on the rebuilding price, you could risk not having enough funds to rebuild your home in similar size and quality as your current home. A good website for estimating the current replacement cost value for your home is building-cost.net; however, the best thing you can do to ensure you are properly protected is to have your insurance agent estimate the replacement cost for your home.

Keeping Inventory of Your Personal Possessions

Create a list containing all of your personal possessions, adding and updating it as necessary. Also, keep track of when and where you purchased these items, possibly including receipts. This will help settle claims faster, should any of your possessions be damaged or stolen. A useful online tool for tracking home inventory can be found on the Insurance Information Institute website, KnowYourStuff.org. If possible, it may save time and be more accurate to do a periodic walk-through of your home with a video camera, and keep the tape in a safe location away from your home, such as a safe deposit box.

Adding on Extras

You also may want to consider additional coverage for your home for your more expensive possessions. Most plans have limits on the amount that can be reimbursed for certain items, such as jewelry, art and antiques. You can purchase endorsements to increase the coverage provided from these items.

Homeowners policies exclude floods and/or earthquakes from their plans. If you live in an area prone to earthquake, consider adding an endorsement to further protect your home in case of such an event. Flood coverage is available through the National Flood Insurance program (NFIP). For more information on flood insurance, visit the NFIP website, FloodSmart.gov, which has printable educational materials, including a list of the most frequently asked flood insurance questions.

Your home is one of the largest investments you'll ever make. Take time to ensure you have the proper protection and coverage for your possessions before disaster strikes. ■



THE GUIDELINE® — A HELPFUL SOLUTION

Express Claim Reporting Service — 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

At GuideOne Insurance, we try to make the handling of your claim as trouble-free as possible. The GuideLine is an around-the-clock auto and homeowners claim reporting service available for our valued customers. Since accidents can occur at any time, you can report your claim to our toll-free number, **1-888-748-4326**. You will be connected with helpful customer service representatives who will guide you through the loss reporting process. With the GuideLine, you won't have to wait until normal business hours to report your claim. Representatives are available to take the details of your claim 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ■

PROTECTION FOR THE INTERNET AGE

Not only is it the fastest growing form of communication in the United States, social media also is quickly becoming a useful tool for all generations. The quickness of which you can communicate instantly with anyone around the world is certainly what draws us to the Internet. However, would your family's financial future be at risk if you lost a million-dollar slander or defamation of character lawsuit for something you or a family member posted on the Internet? Americans are suing more often, litigating a wider range of claims and winning larger judgments. Personal Excess Liability (PEL) coverage from GuideOne Insurance is coverage you can't afford to be without in today's world.

Protect your savings with Personal Excess Liability Coverage from GuideOne. To learn more, contact your GuideOne agent today. ■

PEL Coverage offers the extra protection you need in case of a lawsuit by providing:

- Legal defense expenses of covered losses;
- Coverage for personal, non-business injury acts, such as slander, defamation of character or invasion of privacy; and
- The option to choose either a \$1 or \$2 million limit of liability.