

# DOCUMENTATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE: WHY EVERYONE NEEDS A HOME INVENTORY

When was the last time you took an inventory of your household items? In most cases, people haven't even thought about it, nor do they realize what a safeguard this is should a loss occur. Other than very large items such as furniture, many of us consider the rest of our belongings as just a lot of "stuff." But when your stuff is stolen, damaged or destroyed by a covered peril, the insurance company is going to want to know what was lost. They do not consider "all my stuff" to be a valid answer.

A home inventory is needed because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Creating and maintaining a home inventory can help you organizationally as well as financially.

For most people, such a task is daunting. Some approach inventory on a room-by-room basis, others on a category basis (i.e., electronics inventory, pots and pans inventory, CD inventory and so forth). Some even approach it on a square footage basis. Find what works for you and accept that it will likely take more than one day to complete.

Several methods for taking inventory are described below. With all of them, be sure that you send a copy of the inventory to your insurance broker and keep a copy in your safety deposit box. Regardless of the method selected you should update the inventory at least yearly; more frequently as needed depending on your buying habits, significant purchases (furniture, jewelry or fine arts) or lifestyle changes (i.e., a new baby arrives – with all his or her possessions).



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■ **HIRE A FIRM THAT SPECIALIZES IN DOCUMENTING HOME INVENTORY.** The company personnel will come into your home, document and photograph your articles and place a value on each item. Prices vary by size and scope of the project. Even if the firm keeps a copy of the inventory, it would still be wise for you to keep your own copy of the final inventory in an off-site location, such as a safety deposit box, and make sure that your insurance broker has a copy.

- **MANUAL INVENTORY.** *Real Simple* magazine offers easy suggestions on how to do a manual inventory. [Click here](#)
- **MOVIE CAMERA INVENTORY.** By far the easiest to do but not necessarily the most complete. The first shot taken should be a card with the date written in large, easy-to-read letters. Then pan each room slowly, including closets from top to bottom. All drawers should be opened and photographed. Don't forget to include electronics.
- **PHOTOGRAPH INVENTORY.** Photographing each item can be time consuming; however, it is easy to do with a digital camera, and you can keep track of items on your computer.

- **FINE ARTS, JEWELRY, SILVER AND SILVERWARE SHOULD ALL BE SCHEDULED ON A PERSONAL PROPERTY INSURANCE POLICY.**

The advantage here is that there is no deductible if your items are lost, stolen or destroyed, and your insurance company has a description and value of each item insured.



## YOU MAY LIVE IN A REGISTERED HISTORIC HOME OR NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT YOUR INSURANCE NEEDS TO BE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

You find that old-fashioned neighborhood in almost every town. You know, the one with the older homes surrounded by mature landscaping and abundant flowers. Perhaps the streets meander, affording a serene place to walk after dinner on a summer night.

Some of us have a penchant for returning older historic homes to their original glory: from the meticulous pressed-tin ceilings and intricately carved woodwork to the polished wood floors and gracious, colorful tile work.

If your home is one of the more than 80,000 landmarks in the National Register of Historic Places, you are living with history every day. A lot of expense and labor has gone into returning and maintaining your home to its historic standard. It's equally important that your Homeowners policy respond correctly. Too many times, people learn when they least want to – in a claim situation – that their policy does not include rebuilding to the like,

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*You May Live in a Registered Historic Home or Neighborhood, But Your Insurance Needs to be 21<sup>ST</sup> Century – continued from page 2*

kind and quality that their home was originally built, nor the expenses associated with new regulatory requirement compliance. Here's an example.

Don and Shelley Smith live in an Art Deco masterpiece built in 1925 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Recently they opened their home to a fundraising event, and a guest accidentally knocked a candle off the table near a living room curtain, setting the house on fire. No one was hurt, but the house sustained extensive fire, smoke and water damage.

The Smith's insurance policy states it will pay to replace the home, but problems surfaced immediately. For example, the interior walls of the home are lath and plaster. The insurance company would only pay for drywall. The built-in curved woodwork would be constructed using particle board with a melamine finish. An inspection by the City reveals that the Smith's electrical system – all under circuit breakers – is not up to code on amperage, so the entire box has to be replaced before the City will restore power. They discover that their Homeowners policy does not cover upgraded code requirements. Finally, they learn that the new design of the home requires approval from the Design Review Board, which rejects two initial rebuilding plans from their architect. In the meantime, their Loss of Use coverage on their policy was only for 12 months. However, the Smiths are forced to refinance their home to obtain the extra money needed to upgrade the electrical system and must rent a studio apartment until their home's design is approved

and construction completed – close to a nine-month process if they are lucky.

The Smith's story makes it easy to see why it is critical that you purchase a Homeowners policy from a company that will inspect and document your home's construction and unique characteristics and arrive at a replacement cost that will allow you to rebuild your home to its like, kind and quality and in line with today's building codes and requirements.

When you purchase insurance for your historic home, be sure you have a policy that:

- Offers unlimited coverage for living expenses; it can take up to two years – sometimes more – to restore and rebuild a historic home
- Includes law and ordinance coverage which is essential when a home must be brought up to current codes following a loss
- Has higher limits on trees, which is important because most historic homes have mature trees in their landscaping (would you want to replace a beautiful 50-year old sycamore tree with a sapling?)
- Covers higher replacement cost: homes built prior to 1945 require painstaking craftsmanship which costs more (special features, such as unique tile work, fire place mantels, window openings, carved-beam ceilings and parquet flooring are prevalent in these homes)

Every home, historic or not, is unique, and it is crucial that you have an insurance policy that properly insures it.

**Too many times, people learn when they least want to - in a claim situation - that their policy does not include rebuilding to the like, kind and quality that their home was originally built, nor the expenses associated with new regulatory requirement compliance.**



# GREEN: IT'S NOT JUST A COLOR ANYMORE

Recently I was looking over old photographs with my grandmother. “Look at those hairdos!” She pointed to several pictures in which women sported enormous, teased hairstyles – the source of the term *high hair*. “We used to have to sit under the dryer for ages, and then the hairstylist would comb out your hair, style it and use half a can of hairspray to keep everything in place,” she said.

I laughed. “It sounds like they had to file an Environmental Impact Report just to get you out the door.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if all that hairspray was a cause of global warming,” she said. My grandmother is sharp.

*Going Green* have been buzz words over the past several years. Trying to keep, as much as possible, our global footprint from harming the environment has been the underlying theme. Fortunately, everyone can participate and there’s no better time to start than now. Whether it’s how we live, what we drive, how we heat, cool and light our homes, or what we eat (and the containers it comes in), living green is a constantly evolving concept that, when put into practice, benefits everyone.

## GREEN BENEFITS

The EPA points out that building green has tremendous benefits:

### ENVIRONMENTAL

- Enhances and protects biodiversity and ecosystems
- Improves air and water quality
- Reduces waste streams
- Conserves and restores natural resources

### ECONOMIC

- Reduces operating costs
- Creates, expands and shapes markets for green product and services

- Improves occupant productivity
- Optimizes life-cycle economic performance

### SOCIAL

- Enhances occupant comfort and health
- Heightens aesthetic qualities
- Minimizes strain on local infrastructure
- Improves overall quality of life

What is green building? It’s where buildings and the land around them use energy, water and materials resourcefully and minimally, which protects health, improves productivity and reduces waste, pollution and environmental disintegration.

**Whether it’s how we live, what we drive, how we heat, cool and light our homes, or what we eat (and the containers it comes in), living green is a constantly evolving concept that, when put into practice, benefits everyone.**

Insurance companies have also climbed on to the green wagon offering everything from premium discounts on hybrid automobiles to special allowances when rebuilding a damaged or destroyed home using the latest green construction and technology.

If you’re thinking about renovating your current home, building a new main residence or vacation getaway, think about the future of our world and those around you: go green.

# REMEMBER WHEN??

Back in the days before electronics permeated our lives, everyone used the telephone directory's yellow pages to find businesses and services. Interspersed among classified headings were helpful hints to the homeowner. These hints come from a Pacific Telephone yellow pages directory from San Francisco, circa 1959. While over 50 years old, they still have value today.

- To keep the floors from being marred when moving furniture, slip old heavy socks over the furniture legs.
- Dry windows inside with an up-and-down stroke; outside with a crosswise motion. If streaks remain you can tell which side they are on.
- To keep string from loosening on a package, wet before you tie the package. String will shrink as it dries.
- If you like potato salad but do not like raw onion, you might try boiling an onion in the water in which you are boiling the potatoes for the salad. This gives the spuds some onion flavor without the pieces of onion in the salad.
- Place popcorn kernels in the refrigerator an hour or so before using. Makes popping certain.
- To prevent spotting hinges or latches when painting a door, rub a little petroleum jelly on them. Stray paint rubs off.
- To make screws easier to turn, keep a small chunk of soap handy and soap the threads lightly before driving.



## CONTACTS

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