

Back to School Tips

THE WEATHER AND CALENDAR still say “summer”, but students are already heading back to school. There are important insurance considerations for students of all ages. High tech toys such as cell phones, laptops, and video games are attractive targets for theft. Although generally covered under the parents’ homeowners policy, values will often not exceed the policy deductible. The cost of specific scheduled coverage may be prohibitive. These items should be left at home whenever possible. In addition to property exposures, liability is also a consideration. Damage to school property, or acts of bullying by students older than 12 are excluded under most homeowners policies as intentional acts. Parents could end up paying for these damages or injuries.

Back to school also means automobile exposures. According to SafeKids USA, one out of every six drivers in school zones is distracted. Students must exercise caution when walking through parking lots and crossing streets. Commuters must use extra care in parking lots to avoid collisions with other cars or pedestrians, and avoid distractions while driving. Cars should be locked when unattended, with electronics and other valuables out of sight.

Transporting other students for a fee to help with expenses is common. However, doing this to make a profit could be considered “business use” and void automobile coverage. Students with cars away at school should notify their insurance carrier, since this change of garaging location could change the premium. Students away from home without access to a car could reduce the premium.

Students away at school may not be covered under the parents’ homeowners policy. Full time students up to age 24 are generally considered “insureds”. However, coverage under the homeowners policy for property at a residence other than the primary home is usually limited to 10% of the contents limit. Students living in apartments, especially those they must furnish, often need their own tenant’s policy in



order to adequately protect their contents. An added benefit of the tenant’s policy is the liability coverage afforded for such things as unintentional damage to property of others.

Students living away should familiarize themselves with the nearest and alternate exits. A fire extinguisher is always a good idea. Microwaves, toasters and other heating appliances should never be left unattended. Subsequent damage caused by these or open flames (candles, cigarettes, incense or potpourri burners, etc.) could be a liability exposure, especially if use is a violation of school policy.

Health insurance is another area to be aware of. Requirements vary by state, but there is usually an age limit at which the student is no longer eligible for coverage under their parents’ policy, even if they are technically still a resident of the household. In addition, students away at school may be outside of their plan’s service area. There are a number of affordable health insurance programs that cater to college students.

Studying abroad is becoming a more and more popular option at institutions of higher education. There are special insurance policies that provide coverage if the course is cancelled, and also pay for travel home should the student become ill or injured. Coverage is also available for stu-

dents who travel abroad during holidays and breaks.

College students are asked to share a lot of personal information. Identity theft coverage, which can usually be included on the tenant’s policy, helps pay for expenses incurred to repair the credit record when a person’s identity is stolen. Some identity theft policies offer services to do the time consuming legwork - an important consideration to a student with a full course load. Social security cards and other personal information should be kept in a safe, locked location.

For parents and students, back to school time is not just for purchasing new clothes and supplies. It is a good time to review insurance policies to ensure they have proper coverage for students’ exposures. Informing clients of potential issues and ways to prevent problems is the mark of the true insurance professional.

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