



The following is an occasional column by Massachusetts Commissioner of Insurance Joe Murphy on topical insurance issues that Massachusetts consumers should consider:

Back to School:

Do You Need Renter's Insurance?

With school back in session, thousands of college students will be heading to new living accommodations. Residency at colleges and universities has transformed from the traditional dormitory hall to alternative options including, for many, off-campus rentals. If you or your child are considering this living arrangement, don't forget protection for valuable personal property like electronics, computers and furniture.

As a tenant in a rented house, apartment, or condominium, your landlord's insurance does not cover your losses due to theft or damage to your personal property. To protect yourself at a nominal cost, consider purchasing renter's insurance. In most circumstances, renter's insurance will reimburse your losses if your computer, television, smart phone, bicycle or furniture is stolen or damaged by fire or other catastrophe. For an additional cost you may even purchase coverage for furniture and leisure items kept on a deck, patio or terrace. Renter's insurance also protects you in the event someone is injured while on your property.

Personal property policies, which pay to repair or replace belongings if they are damaged, destroyed, or stolen, can either be "actual cash value" "replacement cost" coverage. Actual cash value coverage will reimburse the cost of the property at the time of the claim, considering any depreciation because of age or use. Replacement cost coverage, which is more expensive to purchase, reimburses the full cost of replacing the property, without depreciation.

The cost of rental insurance averages between \$15 and \$30 per month; premiums can vary depending on the location of the rental property as well as the value of the possessions being insured. It may be possible to purchase insurance collectively with roommates; talk to your insurance carrier about that option. Also talk to your landlord about installing anti-theft safety devices like safety locks on windows and deadbolts on doors, and make it a habit to lock your doors and windows when you are not home, to deter would-be thieves.

To get started, make a list of all items you want to insure, including the purchase price, model numbers and serial numbers. The National Association of Insurance Commissioners has developed a free smart phone app, "myHome Scr.APP.book", that can help simplify your inventory, or consider using your own camera or smart phone to photograph or video your premises, and attach item descriptions to the images. Find myHome Scr.APP.book on iTunes or the AppStore, or visit insureonline.org.

For more information on renter's or any other insurance question, visit the Massachusetts Division of Insurance website at www.mass.gov/doi or call us at (877) 563-4467. Follow us on Twitter @MassDOI.

