

Risk Management

“Save Money”, “Reduce Premiums”, “Our research shows a man in Dorset saved 30%.....

How often do we see a similar type of advert?

Whilst it is obvious that none of us in fact want to have to make a claim, ways of avoiding loss of damage to property/possessions are so often overlooked.

Elsewhere in the guide we help you with the claims process, but as none of us (and especially the insurers) want to have to make a claim, wouldn't it be sensible for insurers to help us with advice to avoid a claim occurring?

'Risk management' is a term used by insurance companies when referring to measures that reduce the likelihood and extent of claims. Such measures may include fire detection systems, intruder alarms, electrical inspections and modern standard locks as well as simple regular home maintenance.

It is important to remember that neither the homeowner nor the insurer benefits from an insurance claim. It is in everybody's interest to implement risk management strategies that make homes safer and more secure.

House Fires

In 2003 there were 6,608 accidental fires in the home in London alone, causing 56 deaths, 839 injuries and costing millions of pounds in damage to property

Most fires that happen in the home start accidentally. By following a few basic steps you can stop these fires from happening - you are responsible for fire safety in your home.

Open fires/stoves - We may feel that our property is “as safe as houses”. Fireplaces may be less prevalent than they were, but if you do have one it is important to look after it as our ancestors did in the past. You have your central heating serviced but often the coal fire and stove is overlooked. It does need regular cleaning. Smoke pellets can check if a chimney is blocked.

Has the chimney a proper flue liner? If not, a chimney fire can remain undetected before blazing into action possibly in an unoccupied bedroom or a roof space. Hot gases can quickly build up heat on timber trusses.

“Well I wouldn't have thought that would happen”

Shaving Mirror – It's a beautiful winter's day and the sun is shining brightly. Unfortunately, too brightly as it reflects off a dressing table mirror in a bedroom. The ray is magnified and concentrates on a spot on a curtain which may then ignite resulting in a major blaze.

Candles at Dinner Parties – Yes, we know they look romantic and add to the ambience, but once knocked over, conflagration can follow quickly. This sounds obvious but a number of fires each year occur this way. So keep household

Gas Canisters – Instead of keeping them in a dry outbuilding, keep them outside in a cage for security. This way you avoid a build up of explosive gases.

Mobile Phone chargers – Currently one of the main causes of house fires is the simple mobile phone charger left on for longer than is needed to top up the battery.

Fire stations are helping local communities stay safe from fire through education programmes known as **Community Fire Safety** and are now offering **free home fire safety checks** to vulnerable people in the Be Safe & Sound campaign. For more information, contact your **local fire and community safety centre**.

Whilst fire damage is often the most devastating source of destruction to the historic fabric of a building, other causes of loss should not be overlooked or underestimated.

By devising 'best practice' measures it is often possible to reduce the extent to which a property is damaged. For example, it is worth asking yourself whether you can isolate your water or gas supplies in the event of a pipe failure. In a large property this would allow you to limit damage from fire or flooding.

Pipework should be checked regularly for damage and weakness. Surveys of pipework and electrical wiring should be conducted by qualified professionals in addition to your own regular visual checks.

Oil and gas boilers should be serviced at the intervals specified by the manufacturer, as insufficient maintenance increases the risk of fire and explosion.

Risk management strategies can also include practical measures such as pre-planned emergency drills. Such measures limit the damage caused by flood and fire, for example by isolating water and gas supplies, removing and salvaging the most valuable contents and evacuating people. Ensure that the residents of a building are familiar with the property's particular emergency procedure, and that written copies are kept in strategic places.

However hard we may strive to preserve our home and possessions, we must never endanger life in the process. Any emergency procedure must take into account the level of risk to life, so that people only act to minimise damage to buildings or possessions under safe circumstances.

Where a building is in a remote location or has potential access difficulties, a plan of access and escape can help both the occupants and the emergency services respond to the problem in the shortest possible time. In the event of an emergency, it is likely that a fire engine or ambulance will require close access to the buildings. With this in mind, assess the vehicular access routes so that obstacles like parked cars and garden ornaments will not impede emergency vehicles. Also check that unused access routes, like secondary driveways and gates, can be used if necessary.

Theft can be overlooked in loss prevention strategies, but is, sadly, a real

systems that can be linked to 24-hour security firms who will alert the police in the event of a break in. These systems can be installed in buildings without unsightly exposed wires and surveillance equipment.

Thieves can be deterred if they know that antiques and other valuable contents have been tagged. This discreet practise prevents stolen goods being sold on to antiques dealers. Your local crime prevention police officer will be able to advise you on these and other measures that you can take to reduce the risk of theft.

Keep a comprehensive log, with photographs, of your valuable contents. This will provide an invaluable record in the event of loss. Store a copy away from the property (for example at work) in case the original is lost or damaged. In any event, your insurer/broker should also have a duplicate.

By heeding risk management advice, not only are you making your home a safer place to live but you are also reducing the risk of an insurance claim. This is usually reflected in the reduction of your annual premium.

Many insurers and brokers will be able to provide detailed risk management advice relevant to your particular home.

Don't forget the Winter Chill!

The advice given in this Risk Management section is relevant all year round, but the following additional advice will help get your property through the winter unscathed:-

Frozen Pipes - If you are going away, it is sensible to drain and shut off any pipes that flow out of the house. Keeping the heating on low will also be beneficial. Put a towel around the outside tap and turn off any unused water features.

Storm and Garden - Check around the garden for anything loose that could blow around and cause damage in the event of high winds. Store garden furniture away and prune loose branches.

Winter is a breeding ground for moss and algae so a quick whizz round with the high pressure cleaner will avoid the potential dangers of slipping for you, your family and visitors.

Check fencing for adequate support and fix any loose parts. Do not forget the satellite and T.V. aerials.

In exposed parts of the country, the planting of hardy and fast growing shrubs can provide you with a natural windbreak.

Rendered walls would benefit from checking of cracks and if any are found, then a coat of masonry paint would fix the problem.

Risk Management was written by 50plus Handyman, which is the UK's fastest growing handyman business. The service provides a guaranteed property