

## Custom Hunting Information

Many farmers have begun to charge for hunting on their farms. Some are offering Goose Pits for rent, some are doing some limited guiding, and some are raising game on their ground to make it a more desirable place to hunt. In many cases this will not change your insurance needs. However, a good rule of thumb is this: If you charge to hunt on your land, or do any kind of guiding for hire, you should give us a call to see where your individual insurance policy stands. Even if there is a small charge it is good to know what coverage you need to adequately cover the particular exposure. Agent Brent Borud at the Minot office of Western Agency, Inc is an avid hunter and has been telling me he must personally inspect all hunting areas. However, it is thought by this reporter he is being too zealous in his desire to be a good agent as we don't really need to inspect the hunting area. Nonetheless, if you are charging for hunting, give us a call so we can be sure we have your individual situation properly covered.

## Identity Theft

One of the fastest growing crimes in the US today is identity theft. Thieves can get your personal information in many ways but here are a few ways to minimize your risk and lower damage if it happens to you.

1/ Next time you order checks have only your initials and last name put on them. If someone steals them they will not know how you sign your checks. Use your work phone # instead of home phone #. Use your work address not your home address. Never have your social security # put on your checks.

2/ Place the important cards and information from your wallet on a photocopy machine. Do both sides of credit cards, licenses, and important information and put it in a safe place. That way if your cards are stolen you will still have the toll free numbers to call available.

3/ The key to stop a thief from really exploiting your stolen cards is to get a call placed to the correct people immediately. Here are some steps that need to be taken to minimize damage.

A. Call and file a police report as soon as is possible in the jurisdiction where the card was stolen.

B. Call the toll free number on your cards to report them stolen.

C. Call the three national credit reporting organizations IMMEDIATELY to place a 'fraud alert' on you name, and social security number. By doing this you can prevent thieves from using your credit cards and credit information to purchase major items. This 'fraud alert' means the card companies must contact you personally to authorize purchases.

D. The three national credit companies and their numbers are:

1. Equifax 1 800 525 6285

2. Experian (formerly TRW) 1 888 397 3742

3. Trans Union 1 800 680 7289

4. In addition you can call Social Security Administration (fraud line) 1 800 269 0271

What can 'Identity Theft' do to you? Thieves can use stolen identity to purchase things on your credit cards, purchase cell phone packages, apply for additional credit cards in your name, or even change or use your drivers information. If theft happens to you: Bottom line: Call the numbers above immediately to be sure you are taking all possible steps to minimize and stop the damage.

## Questionnaires:

With companies using more and more data to underwrite insurance risks, it seems you the client are getting a questionnaire, an audit, or a form to fill out every other day. Furthermore, virtually all companies are doing it and this endless search for more client data will probably not end any time soon. Casey Tompkins, our Commercial Lines Manager commented that companies are becoming 'information junkies' and I don't think he is too far off. The problem with you the client filling out these 'simple' forms is that in many cases you will fill them out wrong and once the 'wrong' information gets to a company it can cause lots of problems and take endless time to be corrected. If you get any requests for information give us a call and we can help you correctly fill out the information. We are happy to do this and it can save you money, problems, and frustration, if we help you fill out the form correctly the first time. Whether it is a drivers information form, an audit report, a building questionnaire: Even if somebody calls you up or stops by to get 'more information': Give us a call; we can see what it is that the companies want, and help you get the forms filled out correctly, the first time.

## Claims Shorts:

By far the most frequent loss recorded here at the agency is of course comprehensive losses on cars. These losses include windshield losses and cars hitting deer. Of these two windshield losses are the most frequent. While talking about windshield losses it is by far more sensible to patch a windshield than replace it. The reason for this is the cost of a patch is usually only \$50. In many cases the insurance company will pay the cost of a patch even if you have a deductible because of course it ends up being a far smaller claim. In these times of higher costs it just makes sense. As for deer claims: If you are driving and have time to see the deer in the ditch. Hit the horn. In many cases this will scare the deer back away from the road. This works especially well at night. Sometimes if I am in a bad deer crossing area I will occasionally hit the horn to keep deer off the road. This sounds silly I know but it sure has worked for me.

Probably the second most common casualty loss would be Grain Augurs. They are getting bigger and taller and they are totally unwieldy. They don't like to be moved and often times a person doesn't take the time to lower them before they are moved. Also, many times they will blow down while raised up to a bin. It's just a good idea to secure these unwieldy but necessary pieces of farm equipment. Not only do they usually get totaled if they tip over, but they are heavy and can crush someone in the process.

Combine Losses: Rock in the combine type of losses are becoming more and more prevalent. Be sure if you have a combine loss that you report it immediately as many companies will not pay claims that are not turned in right away. Any questions on this please give us a call.

**Loss Prevention Award:** Western Agency, Inc. insured Debby Harris owner of Fiancé Bridal and Formal wear in Minot recently prevented a major fire loss by simply checking when a light fixture was not working properly. When the light kept flickering even after a new bulb was installed she investigated further and found a major short in the power line to the fixture. An electrician found where the light fixture wires had been arcing and had actually started to scorch the surrounding ceiling area and said if Harris had not called them they surely would have had a fire in the near future. Our thanks to Debby for preventing the loss and we will send you a \$50 gift certificate to Perkins here in Minot. If you have a story about minimizing or preventing a loss be sure and let us know.

Getting your loss settled: Finally, remember, claims are not like a 'some assembly required' barbeque grill you may have bought at a discount store where you have to do all the work. Getting a claim settled can be a complex procedure that needs to be properly done so you can get the correct settlement. It is up to us, and our teams of adjustors, to be sure you get a fast, fair settlement. If you feel your loss is taking too long or if you have a question on how it is getting settled, give us a call and we can help get the claim process moving for you. Many times we can call up the adjustor and in a few minuets we can get things going again. For those of you who have roof damage from the recent hailstorms, we have a list of reputable roofers who can come out and give you an estimate to get your roof fixed. If you need this list let us know and we will send it out to you. If you want us to call the contractor for you we can do that also. Remember, one of the huge differences between Western Agency, Inc., and so many of the insurance providers you hear about on TV is that we are right here in your home town; we are locally owned; if necessary we can and do get involved in claims, and we will not just hand you off to a 1-800 number in a far away town. Call us.

## Coverage Shorts

**Farm Blanket Equipment:** Remember, when insuring farm equipment try to put a value on the equipment that you feel the equipment is worth. A good rule of thumb is to use a price that you would expect to pay if you needed the equipment in a hurry and needed to go to a dealer and purchase it. Remember, it is not what you paid for the equipment that is going to be the number used in case of a loss. It is what the equipment is worth at the time of loss. This is why we try to sit down with our insureds at least once a year and realistically look at the value placed on each piece of equipment. We don't want you to be over insured, as this wastes your money. We want you to be adequately insured, so we can pay you the loss you have coming.

**Farm Extra Expense Coverage:** An often overlooked coverage that is really a boon at time of loss, especially if the loss comes at a busy time such as harvest is 'farm extra expense coverage'. This coverage helps you pay for a rental tractor or combine in the event yours is damaged by an insurable loss. Since in many cases just renting a combine or tractor can run into thousands of dollars this relatively inexpensive coverage is really worth looking into. If you have any question as to whether or not you have this coverage or if so how much you have give us a call and we can go over the coverage you have to see if it is what you think you need.

**Companies Exclude Mould Converge:** Due to insane jury awards in Texas for mould related claims most insurance companies are excluding this type of coverage. If you have any questions on your individual policy give us a call and we can tell you where your individual policy stands on mould losses. Really, this issue should be not too large of a problem for insureds in our area as this is largely a preventable type of

loss. Roof leakage, or poor ventilation are things that can be addressed to prevent mould from occurring. The same goes for a damp basement. In most cases, by installing proper equipment, the water problem can be fixed. Remember, mould needs moisture to survive and by proper ventilation, drainage, or dehumidifying equipment you can prevent the growth or occurrence of mould.

## **Westy Hat Contest**

Winner Announced: This newsletter finds us with our first two-time winner of the Wear Your Westy Hat Contest. Winner, Stan Solberg, RR Minot, won the contest and our thanks for wearing his Westy hat while he was being interviewed by Channel 13 News this past spring. Stan will be awarded a \$50 gift certificate to Perkins Resterant here in Minot as well as a new Westy hat and a new extra sharp Westy jackknife. We have seen a steady increase of sales this past summer; possibly it is due to Stan's giving us the extra TV exposure.

New Uses for Hats? It has come to the attention of Western Agency, Inc., Management that a new use for our hats has been discovered. Over the years the hat has developed into the form you now see given away at Western Agency, Inc. This hat has a brim on the front of the hat, to prevent the sun from getting in the eye of the wearer and generally act as a little awning to protect and shade the face of the wearer. However, it has been pointed out to us that our younger insureds have been having problems with protecting and shading the back of their necks. The reason we know this is that we many times see our younger insureds wearing their hats backwards. Possibly we should be looking into a hat with two brims. We will continue to monitor the situation and will keep you informed.

## **Who Redesigned Salad?**

At the risk of departing from a strict Insurance format this reporter would like to ask the question, "Who redesigned salad". In an attempt to prevent becoming a 'bigger' agent; lately I have been really making an attempt to order more salad and less 'burgers, fries, and cherry pies.' The problem I am having is that instead of getting a salad I get a salad, croutons, all kinds of cheese, maybe some mandarin oranges, and various other added on items. Many times you really have to dig to get to the pure 'salad'. Invariably I forget to admonish the waiter; to bring me ONLY salad. Not all the added stuff. I know that Martha Stuart is in trouble for various things and I was thinking maybe she was at the bottom if this also? One final thought on salad is that when the waiter asks you if you want soup or salad? I always envision a gigantic "Super Salad". I think the waiter should say, "Salad or Soup?" Am I the only one that thinks this way? Bon Appetite!!

## **RA Product Produces Extra Claim Payments**

Western Agency, Inc. crop insurance customers are finding that purchasing the RA Crop Insurance policy was a very good move. With the claims from hail and damp weather farmers with the RA products are able to collect substantially more on their losses. While the regular Multi-Peril Crop Insurance policy is only able to pay \$3.15/per bushel for any claims on wheat the RA Crop Insurance policy is paying \$4.04/bushel for bushels lost. What this means is that if you lost 10 bushels per acre due to a claim on wheat the RA product would pay \$9.90 per acre more than the standard Multi-Peril Crop Insurance policy. Also, the RA barley policy is paying \$2.63 per bushel where the standard Multi-Peril Crop Insurance policy is only paying \$1.95 per bushel. These RA products are excellent risk management tools for your farm and over

95% of our customers are already purchasing them. If you or any of your neighbors do not yet have this product give us a call and we will stop out and go over it with you.

## **Western Agency, Inc., Purchases Oakes Insurance**

Western Agency, Inc., president, Chuck Tompkins today announced the purchase of Oakes Insurance from owner Don Sylling effective 9/1/02. In announcing the purchase Tompkins expressed his pleasure in becoming affiliated with such an excellent agency. Tompkins elaborated "Oakes insurance has been in business since 1912, and we feel that the excellent staff of Oakes Insurance, coupled with the expertise and extensive list of companies of Western Agency, Inc., will combine to produce an excellent source of insurance coverage for the Oakes community." Tompkins further explained that Oakes Insurance would become part of the Western Agency, Inc, Group, which is the largest Farm and Small town insurance agency in North Dakota insuring over 700 farms and hundreds of businesses. What this will mean for Oakes residents is that they will have access to unlimited markets and super competitive prices from a hometown agent located right in Oakes. In the event that a client has a policy that requires additional expertise, Oakes Insurance can bring in a specialist from Western Agency, Inc., to assist Don and Deb in putting an account together. Both Don Sylling and Deb Raun will remain as employees and it is anticipated that additional staff will be added in the near future.

### **Editorial:**

With the 9/11 disasters, the collapse of the stock market, and the general instance of high losses in our state, the insurance industry has indeed been going through some major changes. Many agents are finding they have no access to markets and in many cases the companies they represent have simply ceased to do business in North Dakota. Many of the large National companies have stopped doing business or have severely curtailed writing in North Dakota. This has not been the case with Western Agency, Inc., however. We have been able to keep all of our companies and though some of them have restricted or curtailed certain coverage's we are by and large open for business and our clients have been able to enjoy stable contracts and coverage's.

The reason we have been able to do this is that for years we have as an agency been pursuing strong stable companies and we have purchased the necessary software to enable us to do business with these carriers using the internet, direct lines, or whatever other electronic means is most acceptable to these companies. This means that companies are more easily able to do business with Western Agency, Inc., and are therefore eager to continue and even expand the relationship with them and their clients. Furthermore, by our purchase of several agencies, we are far bigger than most agencies and are able to produce the necessary volume of business to meet company volume requirements.

We are finding that of course rates have gone up. However, we are also able in most cases to package the policies for greater discounts, drop un needed coverage, go to higher deductibles, or even move the account to another carrier and keep rates to acceptable levels. We have done everything we can to step up our contact with you, our customers; to be sure you understand any changes on your contracts. In addition, we are looking at all policies to be sure we are getting our clients the most competitive, and yet effective policy for the money. The reason we are taking this extra time to be sure we have your contracts set up correctly is that we do not feel this insurance crisis will end any time soon. Insurance companies are one of the largest sources of capital in the world, and much of this capital has been invested the stock market. Due to the

extensive good performance of the market, companies were able to keep rates down. Now, of course the market performance is much worse and this has and will continue to impact rates. This is why we need to sit down with you and go over your coverage program, so we can be sure you have the most lean and mean policy it is possible to have and still be correctly and adequately protected. Many other agencies and companies are either not able or unwilling to do this. We however, think it is absolutely necessary for this to be done and will continue to contact you to be sure we have you correctly positioned to ride out this crisis. Maybe it is due to the way we have done business for years, maybe it is due to our extensive automation, maybe it is our excellent staff: but we are here, we have the companies to take care of your insurance needs at competitive prices, and we, as always, stand ready; to cover your assets.

Thanks for your business.

Chuck Tompkins