

INSURANCE Roundup

September 2003



Credit and Finance Information

Credit Report Errors: Since a person's credit report is becoming so important both in insurance and in any banking a person does I have come across some more information that you may find helpful. I was refinancing a loan the other day to take advantage of these outstanding low interest rates and again found a small blemish on my credit report. It turned out I had two lines of credit at Dayton's that I thought we had closed out years ago. Since we have not used these credit lines for years they can have a negative effect on our credit rating. I made a few calls to get them cancelled. Also, a year ago I had gotten a notice from a bank that I owed them \$29.71 and if I didn't get it paid they would have to send it to collection. Linda and I were on vacation and although we had no idea what the bank was talking about I told bookkeeper Gene to send them a check. A week or so later when we got back from vacation we went to the bank and they could not even figure out what the bill was for so they gave us our \$29.71 back. Now here a year later, I find I have a blemish on my credit report for being late on a bill owed the bank. Needless to say I called up the bank and we discussed the problem in much detail. Whenever you have a dispute such as this the financial institution has up to 30 days to get it fixed or resolved. Probably due to the intensity of our discussion this particular bank got it straightened out in 3 days. However, if I hadn't been checking on my credit report I wouldn't have even known I had the problem. The point is get a copy of your credit report. I called up and for \$29.00 got all three of the major credit reports on myself at one time. That way you can check to see if any of the major reporting services have any bad information on you that you can correct. We would be happy to help you get a copy of your credit report. Just call us here at the office and ask for Gene. He is rapidly becoming an expert on how to get credit reports.



Protecting Your Credit Rating: Another note on credit reports is that it is not too good to have too many requests for information on your credit report. When a bank or lending institution checks your credit it is called a "hard hit." These are the ones you want to avoid. For instance let's say you are shopping for a low interest loan on the internet and send inquiries to several different loan companies. All of them will check your credit and it will show up as a bunch of "hard hits." Try to avoid this. Incidentally, if you send in for your own credit report you can have one inquiry per year without getting charged with a "hard hit." If insurance companies check your credit it is called a "soft hit" and it does not adversely affect your credit report. Bottom line: having a good credit report helps you get better loan terms and better insurance rates. Any thing we can do to help you improve your rating we would be happy to do. Give us a call.

Loan Payoffs: How much can a couple of % interest save you? Try a 30 year fixed rate of 6.75% with a monthly payment plus escrow of \$2000. Substitute it for a 4.62% 15 year fixed rate with a monthly payment plus escrow of \$2300. Savings to you: \$306,000. Wow!!!!

EFT: Electronic Funds Transfer payments on your house loan can also help you pay off your house much sooner if you have it set up to make bi-monthly payments. It is easy, simple and saves you money. You may want to call your banker and look into it.

Mexican Insurance Problems

Recently a young man in North Dakota purchased a fairly new car and drove it to Arizona on spring break. Since he was close to Mexico and had not been to Mexico, he purchased a "Mexican Insurance" endorsement from a local agent in Arizona and headed "South of the border." To make a long story short, he left his keys in the wrong place. Someone took them and stole the car. There were witnesses galore, but not much help. Mexican police were largely indifferent; his insurance company did not provide coverage while the car was in Mexico. The agent who had sold him "Mexican Insurance" told him this coverage was for liability only and would not cover damage to the car. The young man is now left with 48 payments of \$287.36 for a car that some Mexican citizen is driving. This was not one of our insureds, but it could have been. If you or anyone you know is going to be traveling in Mexico please get in touch with us and we can show you where your coverage stands before this dilemma is yours. We can most likely have coverage in place for you but automatic coverage is virtually non-existent. Remember, you can drive to the North Pole, fall through the ice and we will happily pay the loss. But go to Mexico, Central America, or South America and it takes an act of congress to get coverage in place. Call us.

Farm and Crop Insurance: Quick Notes

Borrowed or Rented Equipment: If you are going to borrow or rent a combine, tractor, grain cart, truck, or anything else, please give us a call. We need to look at your individual policy to be sure we have you adequately covered. Remember, I don't care who it is or what the situation is. Never assume you have automatic coverage. Call us. I don't care if it is in the middle of the night. Give us a call so we can be sure we can have you adequately covered.

Rock in The Combine Claims. Due to the rash of claims on combines caused by damage from rocks, many companies have put time constraints on when a loss may be filed. If you have such a loss, or even think you have one, be sure and call us and get it filed. You may very well void your coverage by delaying the call. Give us a call and put us on the hook.

Report Crop Claims Immediately: Any crop insurance or hail insurance loss has to be turned in right away. Again, if you even think you may have a loss give us a call so we can get your loss reported. If it turns out you don't have a loss no problem we can just do a withdrawal. However, if you do have a loss and didn't report it in time the loss could very well be denied. Call us to be sure.

Dates to remember: Forage Acreage Reports due 11/15/03, Forage Production Reports due 11/15/03, Last date to purchase forage insurance 9/30/03.

Testing: Again, if you even think you may have a loss give us a call. Of course Federal Testing is again a must. Call us to be sure the samples are correctly pulled and we are using correct procedure.

If you planted Winter Wheat or intend to give us a call.

FSA information. Many of you are doing disaster work from years past at FSA and any records we can help you with we would be happy to get for you. If you need help on this, stop by or give us a call. Try to give us a few days advance notice, as some of these records have to be ordered from the home office of an insurance company. In many cases if you go to FSA and just use the records they have, if you had a Quality loss they won't show it and you will get a much lesser settlement from them. Talk to us, we can get your old quality loss records and help you get a better settlement from FSA.

Finally, it looks like we have a fairly good crop doesn't it. Wow! I was beginning to think we couldn't do it anymore. Yields and quality look very good so far. What a great thing for all of you and for our state. Congratulations.

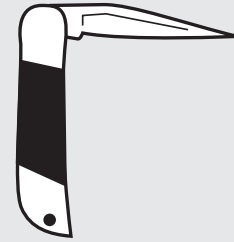


New Contest Announced

I want to send one lucky Western Agency, Inc., Group employee to Hawaii. The employee can be from any of our six offices. The way they will win is if you our insureds let me know whom you want to go. Send me a letter at Western Agency, Inc., 408 20th Ave. SW, Suite 101, Minot, ND 58701 or call any of our numbers, tell the receptionist who you are voting for and to let me know. I'm thinking that the employee who gets the most positive calls from our insureds will get the trip. Also anyone who takes the time to call in and vote or send us a note will have their name put in the hat for a \$200 cash prize. In addition, if you have any complaints or problems this would be an excellent time to let me know. I haven't done a customer survey in awhile and this could double as one of those. If you've got a suggestion that you feel would help Western Agency, Inc. run better let me know. I will give the best suggestions a \$100 gift certificate to any restaurant that will take cash. I want to know how we can better serve you the clients, and I want to reward my best employee. Help me do both would you? Thanks, Chuck

Westy Knife News

Low and behold, right in the middle of a project the other day Western Agency, Inc., insured, Donnie Kuhnnehn broke



his Westy knife. Although this seldom happens, when it was brought to our attention we quickly gave Donnie a new

knife and got him back on the road. If you have broken, lost, or had your Westy knife stolen, or if you just want a new knife, be sure and give us a call so we can get you taken care of.

Personally, I feel that being out in the world without a good Westy knife in your pocket is like going out there half dressed. Another thing that has been brought to my attention is that Westy knives are not just for men. If any of you ladies want a Westy knife let us know. You can stop in and get one or one of the agents will be happy to bring one out. Also, Craig and I were talking the other day and we were thinking maybe we should order knives with the tip of the blade already broken off so some of you could start using your knife for a screwdriver right away.

Good Restaurant

If any of you happen to be visiting Big Sky Montana in the near future be sure and stop in at Allgoods Bar and Grill in Westfork Meadows at Big Sky. I really like chili and Allgoods has very good chili. Try the Green Chili Pepper version. It's great.



 **Western Agency, Inc. Group**

Westy Hat Winners

Folks the competition for the Wear Your Westy Hat Contest is getting fierce. One of our Westy insureds literally ran over one of our secret, all seeing and unknown judges the other day and of course, since our insured was wearing his Westy hat, it so impressed the judge he put the insureds name in for a win on the contest. However, another Westy insured even stopped by the office to get a hat because he thought he would be in a situation where he "might" run into our secret judge. It turned out that although he did not see our "secret" judge, he was talking to someone who knew the "secret" judge and tipped him off. Therefore, this newsletter again has two contest winners. Congratulations go out to Rick Anderson, RR Carpio for having his trusty Westy hat on the golf course, and Doug Christianson for taking the time to stop in to pick up a hat and a few days later while wearing his hat asking Craig Johnson if possibly he knew the "secret" judge. Winners will each receive a \$50 gift certificate to Perkins Restaurant here in Minot, and of course a brand new Westy hat.



Finally A Do Not Call Number

At long last we have a defense against telemarketers. You know, the ones who have been disturbing your afternoon nap, your peaceful supper, and the ones who constantly intrude on your privacy? All you have to do is go to a federal website donotcall.gov and register to be placed on a do not call list. When you get to the site there is an icon telling you to "click here to register." This takes you to the do not call registry. There is then a sidebar with options; one of which is to put down the phone number you wish to have placed on the do not call list. Type in the information and hit "submit." That's all there is to it. Incidentally, you must have an e-mail address if you are going to register this way. There are other ways to get on the "No Call" list and if you want help to do it please call us or stop in at the office and we will be happy to help you get registered.

Westy Shorts

Grand Opening Drawing: Winners of the "Stop In and See the New Oakes Office" drawing were Jerry Coleman \$100 gift certificate to the Oakes Legion, Della Else \$50 gift certificate to the Pizza Ranch, and H. Vern Hansen \$25 gift certificate to the Angry Beaver Restaurant. Thanks to all for stopping in to see our new office at 220 Main Ave. in Oakes.

Fire Prevention Award: Goes to Dave, Dale, and John Stumvoll of Stumvoll Farms, RR Coleharbor. Stumvoll's have a 400 gallon water tank they take to the field when they are combining and this year they extinguished a fire on their combine while harvesting flax. Our thanks and a \$100 Ben Franklin "universal gift certificate" goes to them for saving a major combine claim.

No Claim Award: This award goes to Dan and Elaine Crookston, Lake Metigoshe. Until their recent retirement the Crookstons operated Crookston's Resort at Lake Metigoshe, renting boats, pontoons; selling gas and renting cabins. In all the years of their being insured with Western Agency, Inc. they never even recorded one loss. This should be worthy of note and Crookstons will also receive a Ben Franklin \$100 "universal gift certificate." Thanks to Dan and Elaine for having one of the lowest loss ratios in resort history.

Recipe Award Announced: After reading the Western Agency, Inc. newsletter recently, Costa Mesa, California resident, Linda McChurch said she liked the newsletter but that it should have a recipe every month. We agree and are sending Linda a \$50 "Grant" universal gift certificate for the idea. I was in a hurry to get this newsletter out so I called my dad up for his recipe for homemade mustard. It's good, it's hot, and a little goes a long way. Use 1/2 cup powdered mustard, 1/2 tsp salt, 1/4 tsp sugar, 1/4 tsp Tabasco, 1/4-1/8 tsp grated garlic, 1/8 tsp black pepper. Add 1/2 cup Apple Cider Vinegar and stir. Add Vinegar to develop texture. Lonnie advises caution in the use of this product but used in moderation it can add great taste to any meal.

Off to College Notes

With hundreds of our insureds sending kids off to college in the next few weeks there are a few cardinal things about insurance that need to be discussed.

Don't drive anyone else's car and don't let them drive yours. Why? Because what if you drive Johnny's car and it is not insured. What if it is a situation where your dad's coverage will not pay for damage you do to Johnny's car. Also, remember, even if Johnny's car is insured. If you wreck it; his insurance will go up. Nothing but problems. The same holds for him driving your car. If he wrecks it; your insurance will go up: Not his. Bottom line: Only drive your own car. That way you will always be right. Final word on your car insurance: if you are getting a 3 point or better grade point (I didn't but I know others achieve this) be sure and let us know. We can probably get your insurance rates lowered. Just remember, if you don't tell us we won't know and neither will the insurance company. Stay in touch.

Apartment and dorm coverage. Of course in most cases there is limited coverage from your parent's homeowner's policy for contents of your dorm or apartment while you are off at school. However, there are many things that may not be covered and the best case is for you to purchase an HO-4 tenants policy. It is just a good idea to give us a call and we can tell you and your parents where you stand. Before a loss. Remember, we can get you adequately insured, but we need to know what you are doing to get it accomplished.

I know I am sounding a bit too much like your parents here

but: Don't Drink and Drive. Get a cab, have a designated driver, but don't take the chance of a DUI. It will be very expensive, it will cost you much lost time, and it can hamper or kill the very career that you are pursuing by going to college. Probably your parents (and I) did it. But just remember there are far tougher laws now in force and far more people in the Law Enforcement business. Don't do it. Enough said.



Editorial...

There are a couple of things I would like to discuss in this newsletter's editorial column. First of all I really hate automated phones. I can't understand how companies feel it is better to get rid of the secretary-receptionist and replace her with a mechanical, dumb phone. It is bad enough when we agents want to call a company for information. We at least are supposed to know where to go and how to get there. But how do they expect you-the client-to navigate your way through this mechanical maze. It seems to me that most insurance companies pee more money away in a month on the coffee room than the annual salary of a good receptionist would cost in a year. But still I see the proliferation of automated phones is on the rise. The answer to automated phones is that when you have a question or problem on your insurance, call us here at Western Agency, Inc., and have us get the information for you. It is, in my opinion, the only good, fast way to do it. It is critical that you have your insurance questions and problems answered quickly and correctly. We are happy to do that. Just give us a call and we can help you get it done. One thing you can count on—Western Agency, Inc. has absolutely no intention of getting automated phones.

Along these same lines, many companies have decided that they need increasing volumes of underwriting information to fill their insatiable data banks. Casey and I have taken to calling some of these companies, "Information

Junkies." To do this, some companies are sending out reams of surveys and information sheets for you to fill out. If you happen to get one of these forms to fill out for heaven's sake give us a call so we can be sure you fill it out correctly. We have had several instances where an insured filled the form out wrong and it takes weeks to get the policy back on track. Just give us a call and we can be sure the information is correct before you send it.

Another thing that is happening in the industry is that companies are doing audits and adjustments in many cases

without calling the agent. If someone calls you and wants to do a phone audit, or some adjustor calls you and wants to come out and settle a loss, give us a call. Many times when these people call you it is possible you are in the middle of something else. You do not just have to drop everything and get the claim or audit done. It is perfectly within your rights to put it off a few days or hours so you can have the work done at a time when it is convenient for you. In addition, you have paid a premium to have us at your side, anytime, whenever you need us. Many times it is fine for the adjustor to stop out or even to do a phone audit. However, many times and especially if it is a complicated audit or claim you should

have your agent with you. Call us, we can quickly set a time when we can be there, with you and the auditor or adjustor, to get the needed work done, and done correctly, the first time.

We have another summer almost done and a harvest well underway. The insurance industry has stabilized and things are proceeding smoothly. Possibly the changes that had to be made were in many cases necessary. In a recent Government Accounting Office audit it was shown irrefutably that in most cases and especially in the liability and medical insurance arenas the increase in insurance costs is simply coming from an increase in claims paid out. One of the biggest problems in the United States right now is that we are desperately in need of tort reform. We absolutely must find a way to limit astronomical settlements for in many cases trivial claims.

Western Agency, Inc., and our satellite agencies are so very grateful to all of you for your business and we continue to keep and maintain excellent company contracts to service your insurance needs and questions. If you have any problems or questions with your insurance programs give us a call.

Thanks for your business!!!!!!!!!!



Chuck Tompkins