

Heading Off to College? Don't Forget to Properly Insure Everything You Bring to School

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NEW YORK, August 24, 2010 - As college students and their parents begin planning for the new academic year, "check insurance" should be on their "to do" lists, according to Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.). For students who live in an on-campus dormitory, most of their personal possessions are covered under either their parents'™ homeowners or renters insurance policy, although the issue gets more complicated if the student resides off-campus or owns a very expensive computer or sophisticated electronic equipment.

College students haul off to school a costly array of personal possessions. In addition to clothing, furniture and books, many also will bring expensive personal electronics and sports equipment. In fact, students and their families are expected to spend over \$33 billion on back-to-school supplies this year, according to the National Retail Federation.

"With sophisticated electronics and expensive sports equipment increasingly common on campuses around the country, many students may be bringing thousands of dollars worth of personal possessions with them to college," pointed out Jeanne M. Salvatore, senior vice president and consumer spokesperson for the I.I.I. "And with the cost of tuition rising, the last thing students or their parents want to do is to have to pay to replace costly items due to theft, fire or another disaster."

Theft is a major concern on college campuses. The U.S. Department of Education reports that there were about 31,851 campus burglaries in 2008. And the National Fire Protection Association reported that there were 6,000 on-campus fires in 2008. Most of the fires are cooking related, so students should be careful about the types of hot plates and microwaves they bring to school. In addition, portable heaters and lighting products such as halogen lamps can also pose a fire risk, as well overloading electrical outlets.

Before packing the car or shipping belongings off to school, the I.I.I. recommends that parents and students:

1. Create a "dorm inventory." This is a detailed list of every item the student plans to bring to school, along with its estimated value. To make this process easier, the I.I.I. has created free web-based software, available at www.KnowYourStuff.org. Students can note specific expensive items such as a computer, camera or musical instruments and scan into the system receipts documenting their retail value. Having an up-to-date inventory will help determine how much insurance to purchase and will help get insurance claims settled faster in the event of theft, fire or other types of disaster.
2. Contact their insurance agent or company representative to learn about all of their insurance options. They should find out how much insurance coverage the student will have on his or her parents' policy

and if supplemental insurance is needed.

Some homeowners insurance policies may limit the amount of coverage for a college student's off-premises belongings to 10 percent of the total amount of a policy's coverage for personal possessions. This means that if the parents have \$70,000 worth of insurance for the belongings in the family's primary residence, only \$7,000 would be applicable to possessions in their youngster's dorm room. Not all insurers impose this type of limit, so people should check with their agent or company representative about a specific policy.

Expensive computer and electronic equipment and items such as jewelry may also be subject to coverage limits under a standard homeowners policy. If the limits are too low, parents may consider buying a special personal property floater, or an endorsement, for these items. This will not only provide a higher amount of insurance, it will also provide broader coverage. Most floaters, for instance, also include additional coverage for "mysterious disappearance."

There are also stand-alone insurance policies for computers and cellphones. Students and their parents may also want to consider purchasing a stand-alone policy specifically designed for students living away at college. This can be an economical way to provide additional insurance coverage for a variety of disasters. For an added fee, some of the specialty college insurance policies also include coverage for damage to items caused by "spillage."

Students who live off campus may not be covered by their parents' homeowners policy and may need to purchase their own renters insurance. Parents should consult their insurance agent or company representative to see if their homeowners or renters policy extends to off-campus living situations.

For students going off to college, the I.I.I. recommends the following:

- **Leave valuables at home if possible**

While it may be necessary to take a computer or sports equipment to campus, other expensive items such as valuable jewelry or luxury watches should be left at home or kept in a local safety deposit box.

- **Engrave electronics**

Engrave electronic items such as computers, televisions and portable devices like iPods with a name or other identifying information that can help police track the stolen articles.

- **Always lock dorm room doors and carry the keys at all times, even if you leave briefly.** And not just at night—most dorm thefts occur during the day. Insist that roommates do the same.

- **Do not leave belongings unattended on campus.** Whether in class, the library, the dining hall or other public areas, students should never leave unattended their back packs, purses and laptops. These are the primary areas where property theft occurs.

In the event that a student is planning to have a car on campus, he or she should choose a safe, reliable vehicle and do some research to find the best auto insurance rate. The first stop should be the family's own insurance company as it may offer a multipolicy discount, but shopping around to compare rates is also advisable. If a student's car is left at home, the auto insurance company should be contacted as many insurers give discounts for students who are living at a school that is at least 100 miles from home.

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