

# RENTER'S INSURANCE

Many tenants assume that any damage to their personal items will be covered by their landlord's insurance policy. This is not usually the case. Your landlord's policy generally only covers damage to the building, not damage to your personal items. If your landlord causes the damage to your personal property (such as by failing to fix a water leak that eventually ruins your things), your landlord may be liable to you for your losses. However, if the damage is caused by a third party (such as another tenant in the building who accidentally starts a kitchen fire or a burglar) or by an act of nature (such as a flood, lightning strike, etc.) your landlord may not be liable. Renter's insurance is designed to protect you against the loss of personal property from a variety of random acts of nature or humans. Items such as televisions, VCR's, clothing, and CD's are generally covered under a renter's insurance plan. Although different companies offer different types of renter's insurance policies, most policies share some common ground.

Damage caused by fires, lightning, riots, explosions, hail, windstorms, and smoke are a few things that are usually covered within an insurance plan. It is up to you to do the research to determine what plan is the right plan for you. You should base your choice on what issues are most likely to affect your home. If your house or apartment is very old, the company you obtain renter's insurance from should cover damages from water leakage, fires, electrical surges, explosions, and falling objects. Living close to campus you may want to look at protection from burglaries, vandalism and malicious mischief, accidental damage to appliances, broken glass, and riots. Some policies also cover theft on or off of the rental property, credit card loss, and stolen or forged checks. Certain items may require a separate policy due to their personal value (such as photographs or mementos) or their value (rare books, artwork, computer equipment, musical instruments, etc.).

To determine how much coverage you need (and to aid you in the event of a later insurance claim), you should make a complete and accurate list of all your personal possessions. List the purchase price and current value of each item. Attach a copy of any receipts that you may have. Photographs are especially helpful when trying to process a claim. Once you complete your inventory list, store it in a safe place outside of your rental unit. Safety deposit boxes are ideal places for the list. You could also ask your parents, a friend, or a relative who lives in a different residence to keep a copy of the list for you.

You should also be careful to read your lease agreement. Some leases require tenants to maintain renter's insurance. A landlord can require you to obtain insurance. However, a landlord cannot use a required renter's insurance policy to shield him or herself from liability if your landlord damages your property.

Things you should consider when purchasing renter's insurance:

- If the rental property is still inhabitable after the damage, will the company pay for the additional cost of hotels, meals, and other related expenses?
- Will the policy cover legal fees for your defense if you are held legally liable for damage?
- Does the insurance policy cover the acts of your pets or unintentional acts of certain family members either on or off the premises?
- Will the policy cover emergency first aid?
- Are certain expensive personal possessions such as jewelry, fine art, furs, etc. covered under the policy?
- Will the insurance company cover the full cost of replacing damaged items with brand new items, or will the company make a deduction based on the age/condition of the damaged item?
- What kind of discounts are you eligible for? (Examples: being a non-smoker, having deadbolts or smoke detectors, having the same company's auto insurance policy, etc.)

Before paying for renter's insurance, you should check with your parents to see if your possessions in your rental unit are covered under their homeowner's insurance policy, if they have one. If your personal property is covered under your parents' policy, you may not need renter's insurance.

The average person has about \$20,000.00 worth of merchandise in their home. Surprisingly, the cost of renter's insurance is very inexpensive. Depending on your situation, renter's insurance may only cost a few dollars a month.

**THIS INFORMATIONAL PACKET ONLY REFERS TO OHIO LAW AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE. IF YOU NEED LEGAL ADVICE, YOU MUST CONTACT AN ATTORNEY. THE LAW MAY HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE DATE OF THIS PUBLICATION.**



**Student Housing Legal Clinic**  
OFFICE OF STUDENT LIFE

in affiliation with the MORITZ COLLEGE OF LAW

**The Student Housing Legal Clinic**  
33 W. 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 209  
Columbus, Ohio 43201

**To make an appointment visit:**  
[www.moritzlaw.osu.edu/shlc](http://www.moritzlaw.osu.edu/shlc)