



Current Articles 1999 – April

Water, Water ... Everywhere

It is the time of the year when we can be inundated with water related claims. The ground is still frozen and should there be heavy rains, the soil cannot absorb the water. The sewer system becomes over taxed and the results are a backing up of the sewer and which may cause extensive damage to a residence.

With sewer problems that have been experienced in our area over the past decade, care should be taken to make sure that the policy either includes or is endorsed to include sewer back-up coverage. However, you should review the sewer back-up coverage with each insurer. Some extend the policy to include loss or damage caused by backing up or escape of water from a sewer, drain, sump, septic tank, eavestrough or downspout. Others may not include sumps, septic tanks, eavestrough or downspouts and therefore limit the coverage to sewer damage only. Another insurer limits the coverage to sewers, sump or septic tanks.

Some insurers will add their endorsement, which may also extend the coverage to cover damage by the melting of ice or snow on the exterior of the roof. With the winter that we have just had, this can also be a good additional feature. When a roof is heavily laden with snow and then the warm sun begins to melt the roof snow, the water runs down the roof, under the blanket of snow. When it reaches the eavestrough, which is filled with ice, the water begins to back up on the roof, going under the shingles and entering the dwelling at which time damages occurs. Not all policies include this coverage and it certainly is difficult to obtain for a seasonal homeowner.

Another source of water damage occurs through "seepage" or water entering through basement windows and openings. Coverage for this type of loss is not available. The seepage exclusion refers to water below the surface of the ground or may refer to the definition of ground water - water in the soil beneath the surface of the ground. Many "all risk" policies use this exclusion and it should be noticed that it applies to water below the surface of the ground! Several years ago and during a heavy rainstorm and high winds, a high rise apartment building had water driven through the building walls and causing damage to tenants apartments. The all risk approach and since the water was well above the ground responded to these losses.

A change in the water table can also cause severe damage when the building settles or there is other damage from "earth movement", Buildings may incur cracks in the basement floors or walls and, if the movement is severe, walls above grade may crack and bricks come loose. Most policies exclude such losses except for ensuing loss or damage, which results from fire or explosion.

It is a good idea to review your wordings and ensure that the best water damage coverage, is included or added by endorsement. At renewal time, the accompany letter should advise the client of what is covered and more important what is not covered by the policy.

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