

Insurance and Safety Fire Report



Georgia Department of Insurance—John W. Oxendine, Commissioner

Thousands Helped In 2008

\$22 Million in Insurance Claims Recovered

In 2008, Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine's office helped thousands of Georgia consumers settle disputes with their insurance companies, returning \$22 million in insurance claims to policyholders, money they might not have received without his help.

"Representatives in our Consumer Services and Managed Care Divisions helped consumers and businesses retrieve \$22,061,904," Oxendine said. "Many of the citizens who called my office had claim disputes with insurance companies, and our investigators were able to secure a settlement favorable to the consumer."

Specialists in Oxendine's Consumer Services and Managed Care Divisions can help with problems in life, health, auto and homeowners insurance.

Consumers can call even if they just want their insurance policy explained or reviewed, the Commissioner said.

"Our office takes calls Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., so we can offer the convenience of assisting



consumers by phone after traditional working hours," Oxendine added.

The Commissioner also sends field representatives to counties outside the metropolitan Atlanta area at least once a month. Consumers with insurance questions or problems can contact us at **404-656-2070**, or toll-free at **1-800-656-2298**.

Over the past 14 years, Oxendine's office has help retrieved more than \$198 million for consumers who have had claim disputes with their insurance company.

Volume 1, Issue 1

March 2009

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Federal Stimulus – Group Coverage Continuation Subsidy

On February 17, 2009, the President signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, commonly called the Stimulus Plan. The new law provides a subsidy that may reduce, by 65%, the cost of COBRA or Georgia state group health continuation insurance coverage for workers who lose their jobs.

For More Information:

Call our Consumer Services Division at (800) 656-2298 or visit our website at www.gainsurance.org/PublicInformation/Alert.aspx?DI=245



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Department's Website Receives "Excellent" Rating By Consumer Group

The Consumer Federation of America has rated the Georgia Department of Insurance website "excellent" for providing consumer information about auto and homeowners insurance.

"Often our Website is the first contact a consumer has with this office," Oxendine said. "I'm glad the Consumer Federation of America has recognized our efforts to reach out to Georgia citizens."

In addition, insurance agents may check the status of their license, download applications and other forms, and file those forms online.

The Consumer Federation of America is a Washington, DC based non-profit organization founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, education and advocacy.

California, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah also received an excellent rating.



LOWNDES COUNTY HOSPITAL JOINS TELEMEDICINE PROGRAM



On February 9, Smith Northview Hospital in Lowndes County became the latest health facility to join the Georgia Telemedicine Program, part of Commissioner Oxendine's Rural Health Initiative.

"Telemedicine is providing our citizens with access to the highest quality and most advanced medical care available anywhere in Georgia," Oxendine said. "There will be no need for our rural residents to travel across the state seeking the best possible healthcare."

Telemedicine is a healthcare delivery method that applies high-speed telecommunications systems, computer technology and specialized medical cameras to allow doctors to examine, diagnose, treat and educate patients at a distance. Oxendine said Georgia's telemedicine program is utilizing more than

20 specialties including Behavioral Health, Cardiology, Dermatology, Endocrinology, Internal Medicine, Neurology, Pediatrics and Psychiatry.

The Georgia Telemedicine program which provides access to specialty healthcare for all Georgia residents through telemedicine is becoming one of the most comprehensive and integrated statewide networks, with 89 rural presentation sites tightly linked with major teaching hospitals.

Department Responds To Tornado Victims Across The State

Ten violent tornados that struck Georgia on the evening of February 18 caused an estimated \$35 million in insured losses across the state.

Commissioner Oxendine and his Disaster Response Team visited Coweta, Grady, Hancock, Jasper, Putnam and Thomas Counties to get an idea of losses, and to assist Georgians with any claims arising from the storm.

"My staff and I spent some time surveying damage and talking with residents in those counties to get a first-hand look at the situation," Oxendine said. "The damage was quite extensive in some areas, with the Thomasville community especially hard hit."

Oxendine noted that the \$35 million figure is insured properties; the actual amount is much higher when you consider things like infrastructure damage and uninsured losses.



CHANGE YOUR CLOCK, CHANGE YOUR BATTERY



Oxendine installing a smoke alarm in Dawsonville

Commissioner Oxendine recently reminded Georgians that when changing their clocks to daylight saving time – they should also change the batteries in their smoke alarms.

Oxendine said the annual change from standard time to daylight saving time, whenever it occurs, is a good time to make sure your smoke alarm is working as it should.

“Every year in Georgia there are fire fatalities in homes that didn’t have smoke alarms, or where the alarms didn’t function because of dead batteries,” Oxendine said. “If you have a smoke alarm, make sure it’s in working order. Changing the battery at least once every year and cleaning dust from the devices are easy ways to ensure continued protection of your family and your property. Having a working smoke alarm doubles the chances you will survive a fire in your home.”

This year daylight saving time began on Sunday, March 8 at 2 a.m., when clocks were set ahead one hour.

Department Requires Electronic Funds Transfer On Future SERFF

Commissioner Oxendine issued two bulletins (09-P&C-1 and 09-L&H-1), informing insurers that electronic funds transfers (EFT) will be required when paying fees for rate filings beginning May 1 of this year. The EFT requirement also applies to rule and form filings.

The implementation of mandatory EFT payments for filing fees will allow for faster review and more efficiency in the filing process.

Georgia mandated the system for electronic rate and form filing (SERFF), effective January 1, 2007, on all filings, including title, insurer’s

rate, rule and/or form filings.

Transferring funds electronically will further streamline the filing process.

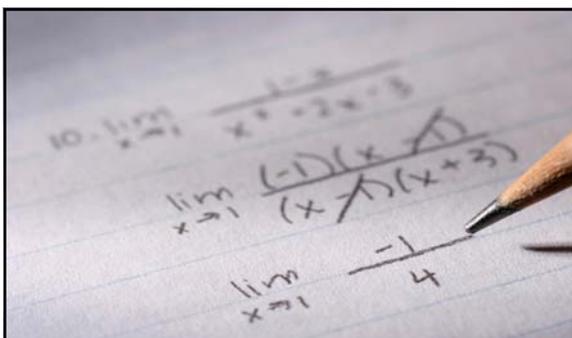
“We have seen an increase use of EFT payments already in Georgia, with approximately 85% of our filing fees being submitted electronically,” Oxendine said. “This has dramatically decreased the lag time for filings.”

To sign up for EFT, you may contact the SERFF Marketing Team at serffmktg@naic.org or 816-783-8787.

EFT payments are currently optional and will remain that way until April 30, 2009.



DIMINISHED VALUE CLARIFIED FOR AUTO COMPANIES



Insurance Commissioner John Oxendine has issued a directive informing automobile insurance companies licensed to conduct business in Georgia about the proper handling of diminished value claims.

Commissioner Oxendine ordered all auto insurance companies to cease using any language that implies that the Department of Insurance has endorsed or approved a particular formula for determining diminution of value in physical damage automobile claims.

Diminished value refers to the loss of value in a vehicle that has been damaged and repaired. The Commissioner issued a previous directive

in 2001 regarding the Georgia Supreme Court ruling that set precedent for diminished value claims.

What this clarification means for consumers is that their insurer will have to settle each claim on an individual basis, because no single formula can be applied to all diminished value claims.



Photos From Across the State



Firefighter's Recognition Day In Atlanta



Telemedicine Ribbon Cutting In Valdosta



Home Heating Safety Demonstration In Thomasville



Reassuring Storm Victims In Coweta County



Assisting Storm Victims In Sparta



Recognizing Law Enforcement In Nashville

Q&A with Commissioner Oxendine

Q: I found an old life insurance policy that my grandmother had, but no one seems to have heard of the company. Is there a way to find out if the policy is still valid?

A: It's possible the company that issued that life policy has changed its name, merged with another company or sold the policy to another company. While the original policyholder should have been notified of this change at the time it happened, the correspondence may have been lost or misdirected (that's why it's important to make sure your mailing address is always current on your policy).

If you know the entire legal name of the old insurance company (this should be listed on the policy), what state the policy was purchased in, and when the policy was purchased, you can contact the insurance department in the state where the insurance company was located at the time the policy was issued. Many times, the state insurance department will be able to track name changes and/or mergers that impacted the insurance company. In Georgia you can contact our Consumer Services Division at 1-800-656-2298 for assistance.



Comments about this edition should be emailed to inscomm@oci.ga.gov