

# Saving Money on Your Insurance

BY JOSE MONTEMAYOR

## *Homeowners Policies Cover Damage from Downed Trees*

**A**FTER ICE STORMS struck North Texas at the end of December 2000, many people wondered if their homeowners policies would pay for damage caused when ice-laden trees and branches came crashing down.

Here are some of the questions commonly asked by callers to the Texas Department of Insurance after the ice storms:

**Q What is my insurance company responsible to pay for if a tree or tree limbs fell on my house because of the ice storm?**

**A** If the tree or limbs damaged your house, the company must **1)** pay for repairing the damage and **2)** pay to remove the tree or tree limbs from your property. Claim payments, of course, are reduced by the deductible shown on the policy. Common deductibles include \$250, \$500 and 1 percent of the home's insured value.

**Q My insurance company only paid enough to have the tree removed from my house but not to have it hauled away. Should the company also pay to have the tree cut up and hauled away?**

**A** Yes. Your homeowners policy covers the cost of removing the tree from your premises if it fell on and damaged insured property.

**Q A tree fell on my fence, but I was told there was no coverage to remove the tree since it did not fall on my house. Is this correct?**

**A** No. The policy automatically covers "other structures," up to 10 percent of the amount of insurance on your house. "Other structures" includes fences and outbuildings. Therefore, if the tree damaged your fence, the debris removal provisions of your policy cover the cost of having the tree removed from your property.

**Q A tree fell on my barbecue pit, but I was told there was no coverage to remove the tree since it did not fall on my house. Is this correct?**

**A** Most policies cover damage caused by falling objects to personal property that is

not contained in a building. However, not all policies pay for debris removal of a tree that has fallen on personal property because of the weight of ice or snow. You should contact your agent about your specific coverages.

**Q A tree fell down and landed in my yard. Is there coverage to have it removed and buy a new tree?**

**A** No. The debris removal provision of your policy does not apply if the tree did not fall on and damage insured property. While your homeowners policy covers the loss of trees to fire, explosion and vandalism and other such "named perils," it does not cover trees against weather-related damage.

**Q A tree fell on my car. Will my homeowners policy pay for the damage to my car and for removing the tree?**

**A** No. Homeowners policies do not cover vehicles. Since a car is not covered property, the debris removal provision of your policy will not pay to have the tree removed. You should contact your automobile insurance agent or company to determine if you have coverage for your damaged vehicle.

**Q All of the food in my refrigerator and freezer spoiled when we lost power during the ice storm. Will my homeowners policy cover this food loss?**

**A** It might. Your policy includes "consequential loss" coverage that pays up to \$500 for spoiled food because of damage to off-premise power equipment. The damage must have been caused by a covered peril under the homeowners policy.

**Q I stayed in a motel because I lost power to my home. Will my homeowners policy pay for my motel bill?**

**A** No. However, the "loss of use" provision of your policy does pay for additional living expenses when a covered peril—such as falling objects—damages your house and makes it unlivable. Loss of use coverage is not subject to a separate or additional deductible. ★

### **Editors:**

- If you need further information, call: **Texas Department of Insurance Public Information Office (512) 463-6425**

*We welcome your questions and suggestions about this column.*