

# Saving Money on Your Insurance

BY JOSE MONTE MAYOR

## *TDI's Web Site is a Powerful Tool for Consumers*

**S**MART INSURANCE CONSUMERS want to find good prices, understand their rights as policyholders and have the information they need to avoid becoming victims of fly-by-night agents and insurers.

In the past, it took considerable research to achieve those ends. But the magic of the Internet has changed that. Much of the information you need is seconds away on the Texas Department of Insurance's Web site, [www.tdi.state.tx.us](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us).

### **Rate Shopping**

Our Web site includes TDI's latest automobile, homeowners and Medicare supplement insurance rate guides. You'll find them under "Quick Access" on the right side of the home page.

The auto rate guides compare sample prices for basic liability insurance for four driver classifications: "typical adult," young male, young female and older driver. Homeowner rate guides provide comparisons for an \$80,000 policy on a brick veneer or frame house in both urban and rural areas. Both the auto and the homeowners rate guides include company phone numbers and each company's complaint index and A. M. Best financial strength rating.

Medicare supplement rate guides compare each company's prices for the 10 standard "Medigap" benefit plans, "A" through "J," at three different issue ages, 65, 70 and 75.

### **Consumer Publications**

Need a crash course in auto, homeowners, life, health, title, long-term care or other types of insurance? Our Web site offers electronic versions of all of TDI's consumer publications. These publications describe what policies cover and don't cover, provide shopping tips and give advice on protecting your rights. Just look under the Consumer heading on our home page and click on "brochures." You'll see the full list and can select the ones that interest you.

### **Complaints**

TDI responds to about 30,000 consumer complaints annually. Last year, complaints

resulted in additional claim payments and refunds totaling almost \$34 million. The Consumer section of our Web site includes electronic complaint forms. Click on "complaint," fill out the form and click the "submit" button. Our staff will confirm receipt of your complaint and start investigating it immediately.

### **Companies, HMOs and Agents**

It's very important to do business only with agents and companies legally authorized to sell insurance in Texas. For many years, consumers have been able to check licenses by calling TDI at

**1-800-252-3439.**

Now they can look up the information themselves. Our Web site lets you find agent information and insurance company and HMO profiles at the click of a mouse.

You don't have to know a company's full name. Just type in the first word of its name, followed by an asterisk or percent sign ("wild card" markers) and click "submit." Besides confirming license status, a profile includes financial and complaint information that can help you choose a company or HMO.

### **Alternative Markets**

TDI has market assistance programs (MAPs) for people having trouble finding home insurance and for good drivers who may be paying "bad driver" rates for car insurance. Both programs serve Texans living in underserved ZIP codes. You can apply on-line for the auto MAP and get information about the homeowners MAP from our Web site.

Our Web site has links to the Texas Health Insurance Risk Pool, which covers people whose medical condition or history makes them poor risks in the eyes of insurance companies, and to the TexCare Partnership, which provides health care coverage for children whose families may not be able to afford it.

Surfing the Internet is fun. If you surf by the TDI Web site, maybe you can save some money and get better insurance protection for you and your family. ★

### **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.*