

Secure insurance

Don't assume you've got the top deal on your house insurance – try our latest round of Best Buys

Many insurance companies entice customers with a good deal, only to hike up premiums after a year. So, even if you switched last year, it's worth shopping around again if your policy's up for renewal soon.

To help you save time as well as money, we asked all 46 companies that offer house insurance to quote on 84 scenarios. Then we studied 92 policies and 4,310 premiums, which revealed that you could save up to a hefty £430. Our Best Buys are listed in the tables below.

Other ways to save

■ If you pay a bigger excess (the first part of any claim) you could save as much as half of your premium.

■ Buying online could reap discounts of up to 25 per cent on buildings insurance and 35 per cent on contents insurance. You also get a chance to read terms and conditions.

■ No-claims discounts can be as much as 50 per cent.

■ Some companies give you a discount if you buy both buildings and contents insurance from them – 10 to 15 per cent is a typical saving.

If you're pushed for time, try our best all-rounders: Admiral, Asda and Debenhams

Best Buy buildings	BEDROOM RATED		SUM INSURED	
	1938 HOUSE	1982 HOUSE	1938 HOUSE	1982 HOUSE
LOW RISK	Budget ^a Debenhams ^a Insure4Retirement	Budget ^a Debenhams ^a RIAS ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct ^a
HIGH RISK	Budget ^a Debenhams ^a Marks & Spencer	Budget ^a Debenhams ^a Sainsbury's Bank	Admiral ^a Asda MRL Direct ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct ^a

^a Also a Best Buy if you don't have a no-claims discount

Best Buy contents	BEDROOM RATED		SUM INSURED	
	UP TO 50 YEARS OLD	OVER 50 YEARS OLD	UP TO 50 YEARS OLD	OVER 50 YEARS OLD
LOW RISK	Bradford & Bingley Churchill Debenhams ^a	Churchill ^a RIAS ^a Yorkshire BS ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct ^a	Admiral ^a Debenhams Egg
MEDIUM RISK	Budget Debenhams ^a RIAS ^a	Debenhams RIAS ^a Saga ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a Egg
HIGH RISK	Budget Debenhams ^a Legal & General	Debenhams ^a Legal & General Saga ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a MRL Direct ^a	Admiral ^a Asda ^a Debenhams ^a

^a Also a Best Buy if you don't have a no-claims discount



USING THE TABLES

Our Best Buys are based on quotes for standard buildings and contents insurance, worth £120,000 and £40,000 respectively, for a three-bedroomed, semi-detached, brick-built house that's in good repair, has no history of subsidence, is empty during the day and has approved locks on its doors and accessible windows. They assume that the policyholder has a five-year no-claims discount. Find your closest category, as outlined below.

Bedroom rated Premiums are based on the number of bedrooms you have. **Sum insured** With a sum-insured policy, you work out how much cover you need and premiums are calculated accordingly.

Buildings insurance

Buildings insurance covers damage to the bricks and mortar of your home, as well as the fixtures and fittings such as baths and fitted kitchens.

1938/1982 house Pick the year



INSURANCE FOR YOUR DOWNLOADS

Penny Phillips 30, policy and grants manager

New technology brings new concerns. If someone broke into your home and stole your mobile phone, laptop and iPod, how much would it cost to replace the music, films, ringtones or software you'd downloaded?

Penny Phillips is a fan of the digital revolution and regularly downloads music to listen to on her iPod. So she was intrigued to hear from a friend that many insurers are now offering cover for downloaded music.

Penny called her current insurer but was disappointed to learn that it didn't offer this cover – so she's definitely considering switching to an insurer that does, when her policy's up for renewal.

She told us: 'I've downloaded about £100 of music so far but will be adding to this, so changing to a company that offers this cover seems like a sensible option.'

Just under half of the insurers we surveyed now include cover for digital downloads as standard. Digital downloads include music, mobile phone ringtones, TV programmes, films, games, software and computer programs when stored on an MP3 player, desktop PC, laptop, mobile phone or home entertainment system.

Here's our advice for getting the right cover.

■ Some insurers who offer this cover don't say so in terms and conditions, as it's a relatively new addition to contents insurance policies. Call your insurer to find out whether you're covered and what the exact terms are.

■ You'll probably need to take out additional personal possessions cover to ensure that the content on your MP3 player, laptop and mobile phone is covered when you take these outside the home.

■ All insurers we surveyed provide cover for fire, flood, storm and theft from the home. A few cover accidental damage. All exclude hardware/mechanical failure and virus attacks – so ensure you have adequate firewall, anti-virus and anti-spyware software.

■ You'll need proof of purchase to make a claim – for example, receipts from providers, email invoices or bank or credit card statements.

■ There can be an upper limit for claims – check this if you have lots of downloads.

For more, see *Computing Which?*, July 2007, p12.

closest to when your house was built.

Low risk/High risk The area where you live, determined by the risk to your home from flooding, storm damage or subsidence. If you are unsure which category you're in, you should get quotes from both.

Contents insurance

Contents insurance covers possessions in your home. **Up to/Over 50 years old** Your age group. **Low risk/Medium risk/High risk** Low risk is a rural area or small town, medium risk is a provincial town or city suburb and high risk is an inner-city area.

Contacts

Admiral 0870 040 1112
www.admiral.com

Asda 0845 300 7131
www.asda.com

Bradford & Bingley
0800 107 3017
www.bradford-bingley.co.uk

Budget 0800 316 5381
www.budgetinsurance.com

Churchill
0800 200345
www.churchill.com

Debenhams 0800 316 0812
www.debenhams.com

Egg 0870 906 2999
www.egg.com

Insure4Retirement.co.uk
0800 298 8707
www.insure4retirement.co.uk

Legal & General 0800 027 7161
www.legalandgeneral.com

Marks & Spencer Money
0800 389 9988
www.marksandspencer.com

MRL Direct
0845 676 0698
www.mrlinsurance.co.uk

RIAS 0800 052 5051
www.rias.co.uk

Saga Services 0800 414525
www.saga.co.uk

Sainsbury's Bank
0131 338 2808
www.sainsburysbank.co.uk

Yorkshire Building Society
0845 120 0100; www.ybs.co.uk

Checklist

Sound advice to help you when shopping around for the best deal

■ How much do you own?

To value the contents of your home, list all your possessions – include items that you'd take if you moved, such as furniture and pictures, and stuff stored in the loft, shed or garage. But don't over-insure, as you'll pay more unnecessarily.

■ **Rebuilding costs** The cost of rebuilding your home is not the same as its market value.

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has a calculator at calculator.bcis.co.uk to help you estimate how much buildings insurance you'll need.

■ **Read the small print** It sounds simple, but do read the policy carefully and check exclusions. Common exclusions include sub-letting part of your home or leaving it unoccupied for a long time – for example, for more than 30 days.

■ **Cooling off** If your policy doesn't meet your requirements when you receive it, you have a cooling-off period, usually 14 days, in which to cancel.

■ **High-value items** Insurers usually put a limit on single high-value items. You may have to pay more if you want more cover for them.

■ **Other extras** You can add on personal possessions cover (also known as 'all-risks cover') for items you take outside the home. You can also add on cover for accidents in the home – which may be useful if you have young children.

■ **Monthly payments** Paying by instalments can cost you a lot more, as many companies charge interest.

■ **Flooding/subsidence** If you're having problems, brokers may have expertise in finding insurance for properties at risk of flooding or subsidence.