



MUTUAL OF **Wausau** GROUP

MUTUAL OF
Wausau
INSURANCE CORPORATION



Annual Holiday Newsletter

On January 1, 2015, Homestead Mutual Insurance Company affiliated with Mutual of Wausau Insurance Corporation to form the “Mutual of Wausau Group”. This affiliation allows both companies to retain its mutual status, but gain strength, efficiency, and spread of risk in establishing a working partnership.

Celebrating our 10th Year of Affiliation!



We have a mutual interest - **you**.

December 2024 Edition

Cost of Doing Business



In my message to you last year, I described the challenging year with the rising costs of doing the business of insurance and how our lives have changed incrementally coming out of Covid. The costs of buying further protection from an accumulation of losses were referenced as a related rising cost trend as well as your organization being asked to keep more of the losses it sustains, similar to being asked to take a higher deductible. I also referenced that these ‘trends’ would likely continue into 2024.

In May of this year, the Mutual of Wausau Group sustained over \$9 Million in losses over a 72-hour storm period. The average cost of claim from this recent storm is the highest per claim event in our history. The Group has sustained similar events in the past four out of five years leading to a number of changes in the past 24 months.

Essentially, 2024 was a year of more of the same. I hate to say or overuse the phrase ‘welcome to the new normal’ as normal is relative. It is a new normal if you agree that the cost to build a new home or repair an existing home will never be what it was as little as 2 years ago. Beginning in late 2023 and shared in this very newsletter last year, the Group began to increase its rates. Subsequently, rates were reviewed again mid-year 2024 with further review heading into 2025. Rate adjustments were implemented at both points in time which will work through all policies over the next 12 to 18 months. These are not easy decisions, but one that the organizations feel is necessary to adapt to the ‘new normal’ and return to profitability.

Profitability is essential in any organization. As a member of a mutual insurance company, you are its owners. Profitability is essential for the longevity of these institutions. In a related article in this newsletter, we will share information that Mutual of Wausau Insurance Corporation will begin its 150th year on December 27th, 2024. We must make these changes to continue to build upon the legacy that was provided by those policyholders that felt ‘neighbor helping neighbor’ was a good business model and that we should form this mutual insurance company to formally help each other.

As you receive your renewal information next year, you will notice the above referenced changes being made to your own policy. Similarly, these changes are being made by all insurance carriers doing business in WI, and frankly, in the nation. As a form of reference, WI is still one of the best places in the country to obtain and have the ability to pay for property and casualty insurance. WI ranks 43rd in the nation as to the average cost to insure your home meaning that it will cost you more to insure your home in 42 other states. In that respect, we are fortunate and the amount we ask policyholders to share in claims in the form of deductible is also very modest in comparison to the overall protection being purchased and in comparison to deductibles in other states.

In the end, we do recognize that we, as is present in other areas in our lives, are asking for more to be able to continue to help our neighbors and continue to have our neighbors help us. I know there are policyholders that can say, ‘why is my rate going up and I have never had a claim?’ That is certainly true, but at some point, it might be you or I that has that next claim. Insurance is built on the law of large numbers. The probability of each and every policyholder having a loss is low which is why in comparison to the coverage that is being purchased, your premium is a very small fraction of what the total claim could be whether that be from a fire, a storm, or a simple slip and fall on your property. The decision to buy insurance becomes not a ‘need to’ or a ‘have to’ but a ‘want to’. Not having that protection can be just as devastating, if not more.

We feel better days are ahead but at the same time, we want to be direct with you our policyholders, our owners, on the challenges being faced at your mutual and in the insurance industry. 2024 will mark the fourth out of our last five years where the Corporations have not been profitable in insurance operations. The last two years have produced the largest losses historically speaking. Our actions, we feel, represent what is needed to begin our 150th year in pursuit of a ‘new normal’ of profitability in an era of higher costs of materials and labor.

As we exit the season of Thanksgiving, we want to thank you, our policyholders, for your business. Our wish as we enter the holiday season is to continue as your insurance provider. Have a safe and wonderful holiday season!

Todd Lentz, President and CEO



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Neenah, WI 54956
920-836-3577

www.homesteadmutual.com

As we move into 2025, we recognize the importance of strengthening and furthering the growth of our affiliation. To foster greater cohesion and communication across our network, we have made the decision to send out a unified newsletter on behalf of the entire group, rather than each individual company sending their own. This approach aligns with our group's collaborative internal operation and ensures that all members stay informed and engaged with the latest updates, initiatives, and opportunities within our affiliation.



The Homestead Board of Directors has established a formal Grant Committee, which plays a crucial role in creating a fair, transparent, and effective process for giving back to our local communities and policyholders. The committee's primary responsibility is to review grant and scholarship applications, ensuring that funds are allocated to deserving individuals, projects, and initiatives that align with the goals of our organization.

This year, the Homestead Mutual Board of Directors is pleased to announce that the scholarship program will award three \$1,000 scholarships to selected high school juniors or seniors for 2025. These scholarships are intended to support continuing education at any accredited institution of higher learning.

To be eligible, applicants must be a child or grandchild of a current policyholder of HMIC.

Additional program details and application information will be available in the Community section of our website: <https://www.homesteadmutual.com/community-involvement>.

Darren Reoh, President and CEO

Have You Heard?

Due to this year's mergers with Homestead Mutual, we decided to relocate and consolidate the Ellington Mutual and Homestead Mutual offices. The former Northeastern Mutual office remains open.

Our new address:

Homestead Mutual Insurance Company
48 Jewelers Park Drive, Suite 200
Neenah, WI 54956
920-836-3577
info@homesteadmutual.com



What does that mean for you?

- **Enhanced Services:** With our combined resources and expanded staff, we're poised to deliver even better service and more convenient access to our team.
- **Streamlined Communication:** The new location allows us to centralize our operations, enabling faster response times and more efficient communication with our Agents and Policyholders.
- **Improved Accessibility:** Our new office features modern facilities and ample parking, ensuring a more comfortable and accessible experience during your visit.

150 Years of Service



In the 1870s across Wisconsin, farmers and businessmen organized town mutual insurance companies to protect themselves from financial loss if their farms, businesses, or homes were lost due to fire. As mutual companies, they were (and still are) owned by and directed by the very people who purchased their insurance policies.

In 1875 and 1876, in the townships of Berlin and Stettin (which included the city of Wausau), two of Wisconsin's first insurance companies were created. Berlin Farmers (Wausau) Mutual and Stettin Mutual Fire were organized for the sole purpose of helping their neighbors in hard times. To better compete in the modern age, yet keep their local service advantage, these same two companies merged their strengths in 1998 as Wausau-Stettin Mutual Insurance Company which was rebranded in 2011 to Mutual of Wausau Insurance Corporation as it began to provide policies statewide.

On December 27, 2024, the Corporation will begin its 150th year! We will formally celebrate the 150th anniversary of your mutual insurance company on August 21, 2025! Watch our website and social media for more information leading up to this event!

Save the Date

Mutual of Wausau's 150th Celebration
August 21, 2025
3910 Stewart Ave, Wausau, WI 54401
10am-2pm

Visit www.mutualofwausau.com for more information.

Marketing

Celebrating 150 Years of Mutual Success

This year, we had the distinct honor of celebrating two remarkable companies as they reached their 150th anniversaries—an extraordinary milestone in the insurance industry!

- On February 16, 1874, Yorkville & Mt. Pleasant Mutual Insurance was established by a group of forward-thinking farmers who were unable to insure their rural properties through mainstream carriers. Determined to protect their livelihoods, they created what would later be known as a Town Mutual Insurance Company. The 2023 merger with Mutual of Wausau Insurance has deepened Yorkville & Mt. Pleasant's place in our collective journey.
- Founded on November 21, 1874, as the German Mutual Farmers' Fire Insurance Company, Northeastern Mutual Insurance has long been a cornerstone of protection for Wisconsin communities. With its merger into Homestead Mutual Insurance in 2023, Northeastern Mutual's legacy has become an even more integral part of our shared story.

Reaching 150 years in business is no small feat, particularly in an industry where stability, trust, and longevity are paramount. We take this opportunity to honor our shared history and express our gratitude to the incredible people who have made it all possible—our dedicated employees, loyal policyholders, and trusted partners.

Here's to 150 years of resilience, integrity, and protecting what matters most. Together, we carry forward a legacy built on community, trust, and innovation.

Looking for more ways to connect? Follow us on social media and visit our website at www.mutualofwausau.com or www.homesteadmutual.com for resources, updates, and opportunities to engage. Let's continue building this legacy together!

Jakie Sperberg, Director of Marketing

This past year a large portion of our coverage area was hit by multiple large storm events throughout the state. At one point in May, nearly 84 % of our policyholders were in the path of the large storm events that occurred May 18th through May 21st. On May 18th, a large hailstorm hit the Wisconsin Rapids area for the second time in ten years impacting hundreds of families, and multiple tornados on May 21st decimated several large farms and residences.

Amongst the chaos that followed these storms, there was one constant that was impressive to witness and that was how the communities all came together and helped one another through the difficult times. We witnessed neighbors traveling from house to house helping each other whether it be with food and shelter, cutting trees from houses, or clearing debris. This type of goodwill and assistance really showed the core values of the people of smalltown WI.

2024 also brought the largest total of fires the Group has encountered in its history. Fires can be devastating to both homes and communities. Fortunately, many fires can be prevented with a few simple yet essential steps. As a homeowner, taking precautions to protect your property and your family from the threat of fire is crucial. Here's a comprehensive guide on what you can do to prevent fires in and around your home.

Sean Sarver, Vice-President of Claims

How Homeowners Can Prevent Fires: A Comprehensive Guide

1. Install and Maintain Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are one of the most important tools in preventing fires from becoming deadly. Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, hallway, and on every level of the home, including the basement. Test alarms monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Consider upgrading to models that also have carbon monoxide detectors for added protection.

2. Keep a Fire Extinguisher Handy

Having a fire extinguisher in key areas of your home, like the kitchen, garage, and near the fireplace, can help you respond quickly to small fires before they spread. Familiarize yourself with the proper use of fire extinguishers (PASS: Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep) and ensure the extinguishers are regularly checked and maintained.

3. Clear Clutter and Flammable Materials

Clutter can act as a fuel source for fires. Keep your home tidy and free from excessive paper, old clothes, and other combustible materials. In the garage, store gasoline, paints, and other flammable liquids in secure, labeled containers. Similarly, keep firewood, leaves, and debris away from your home's foundation.

4. Be Mindful of Electrical Safety

Electrical fires are common causes of home fires. To reduce risk:

- Replace damaged or frayed cords immediately.
- Avoid overloading power strips.
- Ensure that electrical outlets aren't overloaded with too many appliances.
- Hire a licensed electrician to inspect your home's wiring if you notice flickering lights, tripped breakers, or an electrical odor.

5. Maintain Heating Systems and Chimneys

Regular maintenance of heating systems, such as furnaces and space heaters, can prevent fires caused by faulty equipment. Have your heating systems inspected by a professional at least once a year. For homes with wood stoves or fireplaces, clean chimneys annually to remove creosote buildup, which is highly flammable.

6. Practice Safe Cooking Habits

The kitchen is one of the most common places where fires start in the home. Follow these safety tips while cooking:

- Never leave cooking food unattended, especially when using hot oil or high heat.
- Keep flammable items such as towels, oven mitts, and wooden utensils away from the stove or hot surfaces.
- If a grease fire occurs, never use water to extinguish it. Instead, cover the pan with a metal lid or use a fire extinguisher.
- Keep children and pets away from cooking areas.

7. Use Candles Safely

Candles can add warmth and ambiance to a room, but they are also a fire hazard. When using candles:

- Never leave candles unattended.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn, such as curtains, papers, or furniture.
- Always extinguish candles before going to bed or leaving the room.

8. Secure Outdoor Grills and Fire Pits

Grilling and outdoor fires can cause significant damage if not handled properly. Follow these guidelines:

- Always grill outdoors in a well-ventilated area, away from overhanging branches, fences, or structures.
- Keep children and pets away from the grill.
- Never leave a fire pit or grill unattended.
- Always fully extinguish fires with water before leaving the area.

9. Install Fire-Resistant Materials

If you're building a new home or making renovations, consider using fire-resistant materials for your roofing, siding, and decks. Fire-resistant roofing and siding can prevent flames from entering the home, while fire-resistant decks reduce the risk of spreading flames from outdoor fires.

10. Create a Fire Escape Plan

In the event of a fire, every second counts. Plan and practice an escape route for your family. Make sure everyone knows how to exit the house quickly and safely, and designate a meeting point outside the home. Teach children how to dial emergency services, and keep your plan updated.

11. Be Cautious with Fireworks

During the summer or around holidays, fireworks can present a fire hazard. If you plan to use them, do so in an open area, away from dry grass and structures. Follow local laws and never light fireworks indoors or near flammable materials. Always have a bucket of water or fire extinguisher nearby.

12. Maintain Landscaping

Keep vegetation trimmed and well-maintained around your home to prevent the spread of fire. Ensure that trees and shrubs are at least 30 feet away from structures, and regularly clear leaves, dead grass, and other debris that could serve as fuel in a fire. During dry seasons, consider creating defensible space by removing or clearing brush.

While it's impossible to eliminate all risk of fire, implementing these preventive measures can significantly reduce the chances of a fire starting in or around your home. By being proactive, vigilant, and prepared, you'll be taking important steps to safeguard your family and property. Regular inspections, good habits, and fire safety education are key to ensuring that your home remains a safe place to live.

In the event of a loss and you need our assistance, we are happy to help. Submit the claim by visiting us online at www.mutualofwausau.com or www.homesteadmutual.com and selecting "Report a Claim."

For more tips and information please visit our website and click on the "News and Resources" tab.

Underwriting

Season's greetings from the underwriting team at the Mutual of Wausau Group!

As another year comes to a close, we reflect on the challenges and changes we've all faced. It seems like daily we continue to hear about catastrophic storms throughout the country. Locally, we have experienced increased storm and hail events, as well as significant fires throughout our territory in recent years. While insurance is there to protect you if you experience a loss, the increased frequency and severity of these events in Wisconsin come at a cost being higher insurance premiums.

As a policyholder, there are proactive steps you can take to support good underwriting practices and help manage your costs while maintaining the appropriate coverage. Here are a few key steps you can take:

1. Maintain a Strong Risk Profile

Insurance premiums are often determined by how risky your property is to insure. By taking preventative measures to reduce the chance of a claim, you demonstrate to the insurer that you are proactive in reducing risk. This not only helps keep costs down but also increases the likelihood that your coverage remains in force:

- Invest in regular maintenance, such as cleaning gutters and repairing any hazards like leaky roofs and appliances, outdated wiring, or broken windows.
- Installing security systems, smoke alarms, and fire extinguishers can also lower the risk of damage and prevent claims.
- Regularly clean chimneys used to burn wood and have your heating system inspected annually.

2. Consider Adjusting Your Deductibles

Choosing a higher deductible on your policy can lower your premiums. Discuss your options with your insurance agent to find the right balance between a manageable deductible and affordable premiums. With the rising premiums, many times, the savings realized from increasing your deductible can exceed the higher deductible within 5 years. This is important since the average policyholder has a property claim every 7.2 years with many policyholders going decades without experiencing a claim.

3. Review and Update Coverage Regularly

Life changes, and so do your insurance needs. Regularly reviewing your policy ensures that you are not paying for unnecessary coverage or leaving gaps in protection. Contact your agent to discuss updates and ensure your policy remains accurate at each renewal.

4. Provide Accurate and Up-to-Date Information

Accurate information is critical to the underwriting process. Providing outdated or incorrect information about your property may result in higher premiums or even gaps in your coverage. To ensure that your policy remains current:

- Notify your agent of any significant changes, such as home renovations, or a change of address.
- Notify your agent if you purchased any equipment, recreational vehicles, boats or specialty items that may have limited coverage such as jewelry or guns.
- Notify your agent of any changes that may have liability implications such as adding a trampoline, playground equipment or pets.
- Adjust values of equipment as it depreciates. Most equipment on your policy is insured on an Actual Cash Value (ACV) basis meaning the policy will only pay for what the equipment is worth at the time of the loss.

By maintaining an up-to-date, accurate, and proactive approach to your insurance, you can help keep premiums manageable, ensure your coverage remains in force, and protect your assets. If you have any questions or need assistance with updating your policy, please don't hesitate to contact your insurance agent to schedule a policy review.

Thank you for being a valued policyholder! Your proactive efforts make a difference in maintaining the security and affordability of your coverage. May you and your family have a safe and Happy Holiday season!

Michael Moore, Vice-President of Underwriting

New Employees



Mike Lindau

Mike joined the Mutual of Wausau Group in April 2024 as a loss control representative. He has over 10 years experience in the property & casualty insurance industry. With his vast knowledge, we are lucky to have him on our team.



MC Xiong

MC joined the Mutual of Wausau Group in April 2024 when we discovered a need for additional support in our loss control department. MC is responsible for labeling inspection photos and tasking to the Underwriter. She has picked up on her job duties quickly and is proving to be a valuable employee.



Jon Schubert

Jon joined the Mutual of Wausau Group in June 2024. He has over 5 years experience in property insurance plus a construction background which is useful to his claim role for the Group.



Kirby Lawlis

Kirby joined the Mutual of Wausau Group in September 2024 as an underwriter. He has prior experience as a property and commercial auto claim adjuster. His experience will help him to grow quickly as an underwriter.



Crystal Roberts

Crystal officially joined the Mutual of Wausau Group as a Finance Technician in November. She has been in a finance role for over 10 years and her experience is proving very beneficial in her role. Crystal is located at the Homestead office so if you have a billing question or need to make a payment, you will most likely speak with her if you haven't already.



Tina Andrasek

Tina is the most recent addition to the Mutual of Wausau Group as a Finance Technician just this month and is completing her first week, but has over 8 years in the finance area. Tina is in the Wausau office so you may speak to her in the future if you have billing questions or need to make a payment.

Retirements

"Retirement is not the end of the road. It is the beginning of the open highway." -Unknown.



Dennis Vujnovich

Dennis joined the Mutual of Wausau team almost 20 years ago. Dennis has been a vital member of the company but we know he is enjoying the sunny weather as a snow bird!

Giving Back to the Communities We Serve

Did you know that Mutual of Wausau Group provides many grants to the communities that we live and work in and to the people that we provide service to?

To see what is offered, you can learn more about these programs by visiting our Community section on our website, <https://mutualofwausau.com/community-involvement/> or <https://www.homesteadmutual.com/community-involvement>.

Scholarships: Mutual of Wausau provides a Scholarship Program for the children of our policyholders who continue their education beyond high school. In the past 28 years, we have proudly awarded over \$310,500 in scholarships. In 2024, we awarded \$12,500 in scholarships to our policyholders' graduating seniors.



Congratulations to the 2024 winners: Brook Imhoff, Edgar; Ava Krueger, Marathon; Chloe Dummer, Elk Mound; Carly Mohr, Chippewa Falls; Autumn Schreiner, Edgar; Oliver Matthews, Egg Harbor; Nathaniel Nemitz, Marshfield; Amelia Bessert, Aniwa; Giles Groothousen, Tony; Johnathan Binder, Arpin; Andrea Rosenthal, Elk Mound; Lillian Bach, Medford; Taylor Kelly, Abbotsford; and Dawson Schulz, Merrill. Not pictured: Kylee Jenson, Chippewa Falls.



FFA & 4-H: Mutual of Wausau's FFA Chapter and 4-H Club Grant Program supports these organizations in agricultural education, youth development, and promotes civic and leadership responsibilities.

In 2024, grants totaling \$3,200 were awarded to clubs. Congratulations to Amherst FFA, Denmark FFA, Wrightstown FFA, Merry-Go-Getters 4-H, Middle Inlet Moonshiners 4-H, Northern Riders 4-H, Trapp River North Stars 4-H, and Triple Creek 4-H.

Cecil-Washington Fire Dept. Receives Grant



Cap Wallrich and Jeff Homan

Fire Department Grants: Supporting our local fire departments is important to Mutual of Wausau. One way we do this is by awarding fire department grants each year. Selections are based on the needs outlined by the fire departments in applications submitted to the company. Since 2003, we have awarded over \$143,000 to volunteer fire departments that protect our policyholders. For 2024, eight volunteer fire departments were awarded grants of \$1,000 each. They were: Amberg Fire & Rescue, Cecil-Washington FD, Chetek FD, Crooked Lake Vol FD, Gresham Area FD, Marion Area FD, Silver Cliff FD, and Tomahawk FD. Visit our social media for grant recipient photos.

Other Area Donations:

Robin's Nest- Fox Valley	Winchester Softball League
Adopt a Family	Zeller Memorial
Jump Rope for Heart	Winchester Fire Dept Auxiliary
Mitchell Brothers Benefit	

Mutual of Wausau Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting is scheduled to be an in-person meeting on March 11, 2025. The location of the meeting is still being determined. Please check our website regularly. Any changes to the meeting will be posted on the main page.

The meeting will include the financial review of 2024, election of three Directors of the Board, and any other business that is presented.

<u>CURRENT DIRECTORS</u>	<u>TERM EXPIRES</u>	
JON PETROSKEY	2025	CHAIRMAN
ALFRED NAKHLA	2025	VICE-CHAIRMAN
BRUCE BARTELL	2026	SECRETARY-TREASURER
GREG NOWICKI	2026	
LINDA VOLLMAR	2027	
BILL RAUEN	2025	
MARK ELLENBECKER	2026	
TODD TOPPEN	2027	
TAMMY PESTKA	2027	



Homestead Mutual Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting is scheduled to be an in-person meeting on March 13, 2025. The location of the meeting is still being determined. Please check our website regularly. Any changes to the meeting will be posted on the main page.

The meeting will include the financial review of 2024, election of three Directors of the Board, and any other business that is presented.

<u>CURRENT DIRECTORS</u>	<u>TERM EXPIRES</u>	
TODD LENTZ	2025	CHAIRMAN
MICHAEL MOORE	2025	VICE-CHAIRMAN
JESSICA VANDERPLOEG	2027	SECRETARY-TREASURER
TYRRELL WIRKUS	2027	
SEAN SARVER	2026	
MATT MIKKELSON	2026	
JENNIFER BAUER	2027	
MIKE MEHLBERG	2025	
WENDY VAN DER GEEST	2026	





The Staff and Board of Directors
of the Mutual of Wausau Group
wish you a
Happy Holiday Season!

MUTUAL OF Wausau

INSURANCE CORPORATION

We have a mutual interest - **you.**



Calendar

Dec 24-25	Office Closed
Jan 1	Office Closed
March 11	Wausau Annual Meeting, 10 a.m.
March 13	Homestead Annual Meeting, 10 a.m.