



Consumer News

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"Helping You Put
Knowledge to Work"

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We're on the Web!
[http://www.ace.
uiuc.edu/cfe/](http://www.ace.uiuc.edu/cfe/)

Now Available — Parent \$marts: Credit Information Series for Parents

Have you wanted to discuss how to manage money and credit wisely with your student, but needed a tool to help you get started?

Parent \$marts is a set of fact sheets designed to help parents start their student on the road to financial independence.

The series provides parents with educational information,

financial tips, activities and additional resources on how to help their students become responsible credit consumers.

Six fact sheets and a student spending plan are included in Parent \$marts: Credit Information Series for Parents.

Parent \$marts is available at the University of Illinois Extension Consumer and

Family Economics website <http://www.ace.uiuc.edu/cfe/credit/parents/marts/index.html>.

Interested in attending a Parent \$marts workshop. State-wide workshops are currently being scheduled for Spring 2004.

For more information, contact Dr. Angela Lyons, Extension Specialist at anglyons@uiuc.edu.

EverCASH—Gift Certificates that Never Expire

Have you ever scrambled to use a gift certificate because the expiration date is just around the corner? Or have you thrown away a gift certificate because it had expired? What if gift certificates had no expiration date?

Now thanks to Illinois State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka's EverCASH program, your gift certificates and gift cards will not expire. Just look for the EverCASH logo at participating retailers in Illinois. At places where you see the logo, your gift certificates are good forever, even if the gift certificate is past the expiration date.

More than 400 retailers in Illinois participate in Ever-

CASH, which was developed as a consumer-friendly program. Types of retailers participating in EverCASH include clothing stores, hardware stores, book stores, restaurants, movie theaters, grocery stores, music stores, video stores, spas and beauty salons. A complete list of participating retailers is available at <http://www.cashdash.net> or by calling Topinka's office at 217-782-2211 or 217-785-6998.

In addition to benefiting consumers, EverCASH also benefits retailers. Those participating in EverCASH no longer have to report unused gift certificates as unclaimed property. In the past, gift certificates constituted un-

claimed property that holders were required to report to the State of Illinois if they were not redeemed within five years of purchase.

Individuals who have gift certificates that expired more than five years ago from non-participating retailers should contact Topinka's Office at 217-785-6998 or visit <http://www.cashdash.net> to see if the gift certificates have been submitted to the state as unclaimed property.

For more information about EverCASH contact Illinois State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka's office at 1-866-458-7327 or <http://www.cashdash.net>.

Shopping Smart During the Holidays

Shopping smart takes time, skill and practice especially during the holiday season. Each of us needs to practice smart shopping to get the most for our money. Try these shopping reminders to make holiday shopping more manageable:

Think before you buy! Ask yourself . . . do I need this item? Will it fit into my budget? Spending only \$5.00 a week on things you don't need will cost you \$260.00 in a year. And . . . coupons don't always save you money. Buying something you don't need or won't use because you have a coupon isn't smart shopping. You may also find that an item on sale or a store brand item is cheaper than using a coupon for a specific brand.

Check it out! Find out all you can about a product before you buy it. Read about the product. Talk to people who own the product. Ask the salesperson to show you how the product works. See if the product really does what the commercials say it does. Learn the usual price of an

item. Check the usual price of an item with the sale prices that a store is offering. Is the sale price cheaper than the usual price of the item? If the answer is yes, then this may be a good buy.

"Spending only \$5.00 on things you don't need will cost you \$260.00 in a year."

Find out a store's return policy! Be sure to check a store's return policy when purchasing a product. Do you need an original receipt or will a gift receipt be sufficient? Does the store offer cash refunds or only store credits? Do you need the original packaging to return an item? Do items need to be returned by a certain date following a purchase? For example, do you have three months from the purchase date for a refund or credit?

Consider the facts! Think about the product facts that you read or are told. Which facts are the most important to

you and your family? Remember that because a company made a product of high quality one year does not mean that the company makes high quality products every year. Smart shoppers consider the facts before they buy.

Compare! Smart shoppers shop around. Visit or call three stores to compare the price of the item, the different models of the item and the return rules of each store. Buy from the store that gives you the most for the money you spend.

Choose! Be picky! It's your money. Think about what you are getting for your money. Remember if a product or a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is!

Shopping smart takes time and patience. Researching a product or service and comparison-shopping will help you as a consumer get the most for your money throughout the year.

Source: Thrifty Living, "Smart Shopping", Ellen Burton, Extension Educator, University of Illinois Extension

Do Not Call Registry—Update

For an update on the national do not call registry regulations visit the following site: <http://www.ftc.gov/>.

New Housing Software Available Home Ownership: Can You Afford It?

Home Ownership: Can You Afford It? - is a computer software program designed to help potential homeowners evaluate the cost of purchasing a home. The software can be purchased for \$25.00 through University of Illinois Publications Plus at 1-800-345-6087.

Money Tip of the Month



If you plan to use a moving company for your next move, be sure to get several cost estimates. *Consumer Reports* found that people could save significantly by choosing a low bid. Also, use the estimate "walk through" to ask movers for money saving tips. For example it may be cheaper to mail your books at book rate, or to have a piano specialist prepare your piano for the move, than to have the moving company handle it.

CLUE - Homebuyers Need to Get One

Written By: Lois Smith,
University of Illinois Extension
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You've been a regular Sherlock Holmes while looking for a different home for you and your family. You've done extensive research – ferreted out the best location, measured once, maybe twice to make sure it's the just the right size, and worn your fingers to the bone on your calculator to make sure the cost would fit into your budget! But did you think to check the home's background? Your sleuthing isn't done until you get a CLUE, a generalized industry term for property loss history.

What will the property loss history tell you? While the homeowner's disclosure indicates if there have been any problems with the property, the property loss history will tell you the extent of any damage. You can see what the claims have been -- maybe a water problem, or if the roof has been replaced due to a storm, or even if a portion of the house has been rebuilt because of fire damage. This can be incredibly important information since previous claims on the property can impact your ability to insure the home as well as your homeowner's insurance rate.

Who collects the property loss history? There are a couple of well-known property claims databases used by the insurance industry. CLUE (Comprehensive Loss Underwriting Exchange) is administered by Choice Management

Company, and A-PLUS Property Loss Underwriting System is run by The Insurance Services Offices. Both of these are "information gathering" places, much like the credit bureaus. But instead of how much money was borrowed and whether it's been paid back, the property loss history includes the type of loss (including the cause), date of claim, as well as the amount of money paid (which may be less than the total claim because of the deductible) for repair. Property and casualty insurance companies provide the information for these databases.

How can you get a copy of the loss report on a particular property? Insurers have been using loss histories as an underwriting tool for decades. However, computer technology has made this information more reliable and easier for the consumer to get. Choice Management has theirs available online at www.choicepoint.com. Consumers can call A-Plus at 1-800-709-8842 to request a copy. A small fee is charged for the report.

While you can't order a report on someone else's property, you can ask the owner of the property you are buying to make it available to you. Remember that the report might not be a complete history on the home because data on a property is only kept for five years. To protect consumers, federal regulations allow only loss history information to be stored on the databases, not a homeowner's personal

information. You can also order a report to check the history of your own primary residence. You can add information to the report on your property to indicate improvements you have made, such as replacement of a leaky roof or the addition of dead bolt locks on outside doors. This helps lower the risk profile on your property.

Property loss reports are becoming an increasingly important part of real estate transactions. Many buyers now request that a property loss report on the home they are buying be included with the real estate contract. Some state legislatures are even considering making this a requirement for any real estate transaction. And, homebuyers should shop for insurance to cover their new purchase before the completion of the real estate transaction.

So, finish your detective work before you buy that home. By checking the property loss history, you can see if there are skeletons in the closet!

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Getting Started

Preparing the load is the most important step. Empty pockets; remove pins, belts with buckles and other hard items; close zippers, snaps and hooks; take off any other accessories that are not washable; tie strings and sashes so that they won't get tangled up, or remove them and hand-wash separately.

Sort the load in different piles since you'll wash the items differently. Sort by fabric and weight (cottons, knits, delicate items), by color (white, light colors that won't run, dark or bright colors that may run), by how dirty they are (very dirty, normally dirty, less dirty), and lint givers (bedspreads, towels) from lint takers (corduroy, permanent press, synthetic fabrics).

Using the Washer

Choose the proper cycle.

- Permanent press: warm or hot water (whites and very dirty clothes need hot water), cold rinse, permanent press cycle, and 4 to 12 minutes wash time.
- Regular and sturdy fabrics: hot water (for whites or very dirty items), warm (for

most loads) or cold (for dark or bright colors that may run), cold rinse, normal/regular or heavy wash cycle, and 4 to 14 minutes wash time.

- Delicates and knits: warm or cold water (bright or dark colors will need cold), cold rinse, gentle or delicate wash cycle, and 2 to 8 minutes wash time.

Add detergent and other laundry aids to get your clothes clean— normally, about ½ to 1 cup for average loads. But washers are different, and laundry aids vary in their use; so, read directions on both the washer and detergent. Always measure bleach carefully and use liquid fabric softeners only in a deep rinse.

Clean filter, if needed, and start washing machine.

Load the washer after the tub has filled and agitated for a minute or two. Drop clothes in loosely. Don't pack or wrap items around the agitator. Put both large and small items together in each load to maintain balance. Items should move easily through the water.

Using the Dryer

Load the dryer with the same loads you sorted for the washer. Do not overload because this causes wrinkling and long drying times. Clean the lint screen often. Be careful with plastic and rubber items – use only the air or fluff setting for these.

Choose a dryer cycle to compliment your fabrics. Permanent press has a cool-down period to reduce wrinkling; regular or normal has heat settings for fast drying of heavy fabrics.

Use control settings and charts to determine drying time since damp items will wrinkle and possibly mildew. Avoid over-drying because it uses more energy than needed.

When dryer stops, take everything out. Hang or fold items immediately to reduce wrinkling.

Prepared By: Lois Smith, Extension Educator