

Car Insurance. Are you actually covered?

By Steve Z. Gokberk, Esq.

Car accidents are traumatic. Injuries can be severe and permanent. Time away from work can be extensive and costly. Who's responsible for compensating innocent car accident victims? The driver who caused the accident, right? Yes, but what happens when that driver has no insurance? Or only has a limited insurance policy? If the innocent victim was smart enough to purchase SUM/UM coverage, he can get compensated.

What is SUM/UM Coverage?

Supplemental Underinsured Motorist ("SUM") coverage or Uninsured Motorist ("UM") coverage enables you to receive money from your own insurance carrier, should the negligent driver's insurance coverage prove inadequate for the injury sustained. SUM/UM coverage is purchased as part of your car insurance policy. Unfortunately, most people are unaware that they have this coverage or how it works. That's because most insurance companies fail to inform you of the SUM/UM options since they ultimately pay the SUM/UM claim.

How does it work?

Let's say a negligent driver causes an accident that results in personal injury to you. Assume that given the severity of injury, you could expect to recover \$100,000.00 as compensation. If the negligent driver has an insurance policy of only \$25,000.00, that amount would likely be the most you could expect to recover. However, if you have SUM coverage of \$100,000.00, you could obtain \$75,000.00 from your insurance company, in addition to the negligent driver's \$25,000.00.

Is it expensive?

No. The cost of increasing your SUM coverage is relatively small compared to the protection it affords you and your family from underinsured motorists. Review the declaration sheet of your automobile insurance policy to see what your SUM coverage is, and consider increasing it. You should certainly have at least the same amount in SUM coverage as you do in liability coverage. After all, isn't it just as important for you to protect your own family and make sure that they are fully compensated for injuries caused by others, as it is for you to compensate complete strangers?

Will your insurance rates increase?

They shouldn't. A claim against SUM coverage should not increase your rates, especially if you did not cause the accident.

How Can We Help?

An experienced personal attorney injury can help you navigate the SUM/UM process. In order to pursue a claim for SUM/UM, you will need assistance for the following:

- Providing timely notice to your insurance carrier
- Obtaining the bodily injury policy limits of the underinsured/uninsured vehicle through judgment or settlement
- Negotiating with your insurance carrier
- Filing and preparing for Arbitration

We are not insurance experts and any changes to your automobile policy should be discussed with your insurance broker. Our goal is to provide information that enables you to best protect yourself and your family. It is recommended that you purchase the maximum available SUM coverage affordable to you. Feel free to call us to have us review your automobile coverage or to discuss any of your legal questions or concerns.