



Vehicle Modification and the Impact on Claims - Episode #144

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Guest Expert: Dan Thompson of [DeeGee Rehabilitation Technologies, Ltd.](#)

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John Czuba: Welcome to the *Insurance Law Podcast*, the broadcast about timely and important legal issues affecting the insurance industry. I'm John Czuba, Managing Editor of *Best's Recommended Insurance Attorneys*, including Expert Service Providers.

We're pleased to have with us expert service provider Dan Thompson, President and CEO of [DeeGee Rehabilitation Technologies](#), with offices in Ontario, Canada and Arizona. Dan has worked with the litigation arena for over 25 years. He is a registered rehabilitation professional, registered vocational professional, and a certified life planner.

His company services include providing expert opinion to insurance carriers, attorneys, and medical professionals by assessing the needs and locational capabilities for people with disabilities. Dan, we're very pleased to have you with us again today.

Dan Thompson: Thank you, John. Thanks for having me once again.

John: Today's topic for discussion is vehicle modification. Dan, for our first question today, what exactly are vehicle modifications, and what impact do they have on insurance claims?

Dan: First of all, to indicate as we discussed during previous podcasts, I would say that attendant care and housing are probably the two most expensive items for goods and services you're going to get within a life care plan.

However, next to that, vehicle modifications are probably the third most expensive item or service within a life care plan. What makes those so expensive is that the person's going to need those modifications for the rest of their life.

The modifications can vary, John. They may be something as simple as a steering knob for someone who has limitations with their intrinsic hand function.

In addition, it may be as complicated as doing a full conversion within a minivan or a full size van to allow an individual who is dependent on using a wheelchair for mobility to either enter or exit the vehicle, or to independently operate it.

It can be a very, very expensive proposition, or it can be something as simple as a steering knob as I mentioned before.

John: Dan, what are the annual or what are the lifetime costs of vehicle modifications?

Dan: In the example I mentioned before, in terms of the simple steering knob, it may only be a couple of hundred dollars, whereas a full sized conversion can be expensive. It can be as much as \$40,000.

Typically, we as life care planners have a model that we have to go by. What the replacement frequency is supposed to be, every seven years. In addition, John, what we're supposed to do is we're supposed to assume that that individual has a vehicle already.

In other words, we're only looking at the "extraordinary cost" with the conversion, as opposed to paying for the full vehicle. If you take somebody who is fairly young or maybe even someone in a pediatric case, that \$40,000 may have to be replaced, as I indicated, every seven years.

Although you may get some residual value in a trade in, that's still a fairly large chunk of change that you're going to have to pay out for the rest of that individual's life. As I'm sure you can appreciate, you can see that the cost can go up quite substantially.

John: What kind of vehicles can be modified, Dan?

Dan: Pretty well anything that has wheels and/or that goes on water. When I initially thought about this, I was initially thinking strictly about van modifications or things like that. The reality is, John, people go on airplanes. They go on commercial buses. There's a whole variety of public and private transportation that one could look at.

If we go back to the van modifications that I mentioned before, there are two major companies that provide these modifications. The first one is the BraunAbility Corporation. They are out of Winamac, Indiana.

They were founded way back in 1947 by Ralph Braun, who was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy when he was six years of age. They offer side entry conversions and rear entry conversions in both minivans and in full size vans.

Their main competition is another company on the other side of the country, which is Vantage Mobility International. They're out of Phoenix, Arizona, which of course is where my company does business during the winter.

They have 25 years of experience within the mobility industry. They offer side entry minivan conversions with a variety of manufacturers. In other words, you're not limited to what type of vans can be converted. It could be Chevy, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, or Dodge Caravans.

They also offer side entry SUV conversions for Honda's Pilot. They also do commercial vehicles such as taxis and medical transport, so people can go back and forth to their medical appointments.

There's a cheap conversion that's out there. This is by an Oakville company here in Ontario. They're called Liberty Motors. They offer a very inexpensive manual ramp that comes out a taxi. The taxi companies love it because of the fairly inexpensive conversion. These vehicles, as I'm sure you may appreciate, get a lot of wear and tear.

One of my favorite companies is a company called ATC. They're out of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Their founder, Mr. Steve Kitchin, he also sustained a spinal cord injury. In essence, they've got I think a revolutionary conversion that offers a gull wing door on Chevy products.

It could be a high end vehicle such as a Cadillac Escalade, which is what I own. The nice thing is during inclement weather, this gull wing door protects you as you're going in and out.

You could also look at cruise ships. I even found, as I was doing research for this podcast, that there's a company out of British Columbia called Champion Mariner. What they offer is a lift system that takes the person and their wheelchair right onto a boat so they can either become an angler or they can just enjoy the water and go across the water.

As you can see — I know that was a bit of a long winded answer — there's a whole variety of things that can be converted so people can use it.

The only real limitation that I see is going on airlines. To this day, the FAA will not allow individuals in wheelchairs to stay in their chairs. You either have to be somewhat ambulatory or they have to literally transfer you from your wheelchair into one of their seats.

John: Dan, are there any differences between vehicle conversions in Canada versus the United States?

Dan: As I mentioned before, there's numerous manufacturers, both in Canada and the United States that offer unique and specialized conversions for various types of vehicles. In essence, that offers more and more opportunities for people with disabilities, which of course in turn will improve their quality of life.

John: Who should cover the cost Dan?

Dan: In essence, any time a life care plan is prepared, typically, it's for someone who is in a litigation process. It's the insurance companies that will be covering this.

There are some adjunct government agencies, such as The March of Dimes, who will cover the cost of the conversions for people with disabilities to improve their quality of life. For the most part, it's usually the insurance companies that are covering those costs.

John: Dan, what do you see in the future for vehicle conversions?

Dan: I see something out of "The Jetsons." I've always fantasized that if I had a hovercraft type wheelchair, this way, fences, gates, uneven terrain, water would never be an obstacle. This way, literally, you could float around and there really would not be an obstacle for anybody to get around.

Of course, those technologies are not in existence right now, but I would love to see something like that in the future.

John: Dan, thanks again very much for joining us today.

Dan: John, thank you much for your time. I really appreciate it.



John: That was Dan Thompson, President and CEO of [DeeGee Rehabilitation Technologies](http://DeeGeeRehabilitationTechnologies.com), with offices in Arizona and Ontario, Canada. You can learn more at DeeGeerehab.com. Special thanks to today's producer, Frank Vowinkel.

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