



THE FINANCIAL PLANNING ASSOCIATION

of San Diego

HOME

PLANNER RESOURCES

PREPARING FINANCIALLY FOR AN EMERGENCY EVACUATION

A test. You have ten minutes to evacuate your home because of a terrorist attack, an approaching forest fire, rising floodwaters or a nearby toxic spill. What financial documents should you take? Can you get them rounded up in ten minutes? What documents should you store away from home? Do you have cash available?

You may not be sure what documents to take, and it's even less likely you could gather them up in a few minutes, especially when you want to grab other important items at the same time such as medications and heirlooms. The key, of course, is to prepare well in advance. Here are some tips from CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professionals should disaster strike.

One of the key documents is an inventory of your home's possessions. The easiest method is to photograph or videotape your possessions. With a videotape, you can voice record the approximate value of items as you photograph them. Note any renovations such as a remodeled kitchen (be sure your homeowner's insurance reflects the value of these improvements).

A more precise inventory can be done on a computer program or with an inventory booklet you can buy at a stationery or office supply store. List each item, its value, and model and serial numbers where available. Collect receipts and get appraisals for valuables such as jewelry, heirlooms, antiques and artwork.

Don't forget the small stuff—things like towels, silverware and underwear can add up. Record outside, too—automobiles, recreational vehicles, improvements such as a new fence or deck.

Once the inventory is completed, store a copy in a safe deposit box, at home, and with a more distant friend or relative.

The safe deposit box also should hold numerous other documents including deeds to your home and vehicles, birth certificates/naturalization papers, passports, originals or copies of insurance policies, investment certificates, marriage certificates, and powers of attorney. Put a copy of your wills in the box, but keep the originals with your attorney or local registrar of wills.

While convenience may win out, consider using a safe deposit box in a bank that's farther from your home. Your local bank could be under the same floodwaters or caught up in the same forest fire you are.

Next, focus on the availability of cash and credit. Always keep a small amount of cash or traveler's checks at home. Local ATMs and banks may shut down, as they were in New York City after the 9/11

terrorist attacks. Consider keeping some funds in an out-of-state money market mutual fund that wouldn't be affected by a local disaster.

Keep your credit card balances low or paid off. You could be out of work for a while, and a credit card with a healthy credit cushion could be invaluable to see you through. Better yet, save enough cash in a money market to cover three to six months' worth of minimal living expenses. That will save running up a credit card balance.

Finally, assemble what's called an "evacuation box" in which to store your important documents or other items that you can grab quickly when you've got only minutes to flee your home. The box should be durable, lockable and contain self-sealing plastic bags to protect documents from water. Keep the box in the house, near an emergency exit. Don't store it in an unattended car.

Suggested financially related items to keep in the box include

- ? Safe deposit box key
- ? Cash/traveler's checks
- ? Phone numbers for your financial planner, insurance agents, stockbroker and other financial advisors
- ? Account numbers for bank, credit card and investment accounts, and Social Security numbers for all family members
- ? Copies of documents you have in your safe deposit box, such as wills, insurance policies, house inventory, and title to the house.
- ? Copies of last three tax returns
- ? Current backup of computer files
- ? Copies of driver's license numbers

Besides financial documents, you may want to store negatives of family photos; medical information such as prescriptions, doctors' phone numbers, immunization records; and phone numbers for family and friends.

Such advance planning and preparation, and the presence of your evacuation box, will help you through a difficult, often frightening emergency evacuation.

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