

YOUR PREPAREDNESS FACT

This Week:

Your Personal & Financial Data: Are you Prepared?



If you were given only five minutes to leave your home, what would you do? The first thing to do would be to gather your family and then get your prepared family disaster plan and disaster supply kit. What about all your personal and financial papers? Do you even know where they are? Could you find them all in an emergency? Think about what would happen to them in a disaster like a fire, flood or earthquake. In the event of a disaster, whether it occurs naturally or is man-made, people lose their possessions, their homes, or even their lives. Have you thought about how difficult it would be to rebuild your life financially, physically, and emotionally, even if you had all of your financial and personal information? What if it had all been destroyed? How would you take care of your bills if you had no records? How would you file your insurance claim if you had no record of what was lost? Imagine the time and work involved in replacing all these essential papers!

Lets take it one step further. What if something happened to you and your adult children were left behind to manage your estate? Would they know what insurance policies you have, where you keep your bank account information, safety deposit boxes and birth certificates? Would they know what types of loans, credit cards and other debts you have to manage? What about power of attorney? Have you planned for them to pick up where you left off? Overwhelming? Yes it is, but how much more overwhelming will it be **after** the disaster. Preparation is the key! As with any overwhelming project like the dreaded term papers back in the day, if we just break it down in small pieces at a time, we can accomplish it.

You should have a family disaster plan to protect the safety of your family, to arrange communication between family members, and to be ready for the unexpected. Just as important as preparing a family disaster plan is the preparation of your financial data.

The first step involves gathering together your important financial and personal documents and determining one place in which to keep them. It can be a safety deposit box at your bank or a fireproof box kept in your home. There are also computer programs available where you can input or scan personal information and back up on a thumb/flash drive.

Documents you may want to include:

- Credit card numbers
- Bank account numbers
- Insurance policy numbers
- Social security cards and correspondence
- Automobile license plate numbers and registration cards
- Drivers' license numbers
- Automobile titles
- Birth certificates
- Death certificates
- Marriage licenses
- Passports
- Copies of wills
- Home loan information
- Personal loan information
- Stock/bond certificates
- Real estate deeds and titles
- Savings Bonds
- Divorce/custody/adoption papers
- Tax returns
- Armed services papers
- Benefits information
- Medical records
- Immunization records
- Pharmaceutical prescriptions
- Eyeglass prescriptions
- Important receipts
- Business incorporation records
- Business contracts
- Computer backups
- Household inventory
- Funeral wishes
- Address book for friends, relatives, attorney, accountant, broker, doctors
- Additional vital records as per your situation

The next step is to complete a household inventory.

This mission, should you choose to accept, can be a daunting one to say the least; however, in small steps it is doable. Your household inventory should note your possessions and can be done in several different ways. You can go from room to room and write a description of your belongings, or using either a video or digital camera, you can take pictures of each room. Whichever method you choose, you still need to write a brief description of each item, including cost, age, manufacturer, and model and serial number if available. Open closet doors and photograph or note the contents. If you have any expensive items, try to include receipts or appraisals for them. Don't forget to inventory your attic, basement and garage as well. Include a photograph or video of the outside of your home and note special landscaping, patio, deck and any other improvements. This inventory of possessions will not only prove what you owned should

there be any emergency that causes destruction of your belongings, but will also help provide value of items. Your insurance company will be able to respond faster with this documentation.

After you gather together all of your information, make a copy of everything. Get certified copies of those documents that require certification. Choose a trusted person to hold on to those papers and send a complete copy of all of them, including any computer disk/thumb drives to that person. Keep your originals on file in the chosen location and be sure to update that file regularly. Most importantly, be sure to tell your family where they can find both sets of documents. If you keep one copy in a safety deposit box, keep only one key and give the other to a trusted individual outside our home.

By taking the time now to prepare your personal and financial records, you can save yourself and your family from countless hours of work and worry in case the papers are destroyed, and you will be able to concentrate on your safety and the safety of your family.

Do YOUR part for Emergency Preparedness....pass on the information!