

Organizing Financial Records Before Disaster Strikes: Five Steps to Take Now

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Protecting financial records by creating a fire-safe and easily transportable document box will make a traumatic evacuation or disaster recovery process easier for you and your loved ones.

Step 1 — Create a Document Box

Within your evacuation or disaster relief box you should also include a financial box that includes important documents, photos and a few days of cash or traveler's checks. It is best to find a lockable, fire-safe box for these documents that will protect the contents in case of fire or flooding. Make sure to keep the combination to the box, or the key, on you at all times and place a duplicate in a safe place, or with a trusted person.

Step 2 – Gather Important Items

Your document box should include copies of all your financial documentation. Include the following items:

- Checking and savings account numbers
- Copies of documents for you and your family members:
 - o Driver's license(s)
 - o Social Security card(s)
 - o Marriage license
 - o Birth certificate(s)
 - o Will(s)
 - o Power of attorney
 - o Property deeds
- All investment and retirement account numbers
- Home, life and medical insurance policies
- A list of crucial contact information
 - o Insurance agent(s)
 - o Attorney
 - o Bank
 - o Financial advisor
 - o Family, friends or other key people you may need to reach in an emergency
 - o Trusted home repair contractors

Step 3 – Review Your Coverage

Do you have the proper insurance coverage if disaster strikes your family? Review your current home, life and medical insurance policies to ensure you and your family will be comfortable and cared for in the event of an emergency.

Step 4 – Ensure Access to Emergency Funds

Natural disasters often interrupt access to local banking and financial institutions. Make sure you have an emergency account that can provide access to emergency funds within 24 hours or less.

Step 5 – Share the Information

Review your document box information with your spouse or partner and determine together where the box will be stored. Also contact a trusted family member or friend outside of your household and share the document box location in case something should happen to you.

Scott White is president of the Financial Planning Association Southwest Florida Chapter. He is past president of the Southwest Florida Chapter of the American Society of Financial Service Professionals, past president of the Lee County Estate Planning Council, and founding president of the Planned Giving Council of Lee County. For more information, visit www.scottwhiteadvisors.com or call (239) 936-6300. Scott White Advisors is an independent Registered Investment Advisor and is located at 1510 Royal Palm Square Boulevard, Fort Myers, Florida 33919. Securities offered through Raymond James Financial Services, Inc., member, FINRA/SIPC.