

A Survival Plan for Important Papers

In the wake of the Hurricane Katrina and Rita disasters, many Americans are re-examining their own readiness to react, and quickly, should catastrophe strike their home, whether hurricane, flood, fire, tornado or other calamity.

Most of us know what to grab should we need to evacuate on short notice and many of us have these items in an easily accessible location, ready to be loaded into the car in five minutes' time.

Gallon jugs of water, a case of PowerBars, every pair of socks you own, even a 50-lb. bag of dog chow – these items you can probably lay your hands on instantly. Can you say the same for your children's birth certificates, copies of your income tax returns, or your will?

Locating important paperwork as you race out the door may be hard to do. Many financial planners have advised their clients to create a "Beneficiary Book" to help heirs or executors handle their final affairs; the same idea can be implemented in the event you are forced to flee your home.

Here is a quick check-list of important papers you should be able to quickly grab and take with you, as recommended by experts from the banking and financial fields. Please take a moment to clip it and use for reference as you gather your important papers:

- **Birth certificates and adoption papers**
- **Social Security cards and earnings reports**
- **Health and school records**
- **Recent bank statement and pertinent account records**
- **Marriage certificates and/or divorce decrees**
- **Titles, deeds and registrations for property, including vehicles**
- **Mortgage and other loan information**
- **Insurance policies**
- **Investments records**
- **Credit card statements**
- **Photo IDs, such as drivers licenses and passports**

If you gather original copies of your important documents, experts advise you take steps to guarantee their safety. Slip plastic covers over the papers, and store them in a fire- and water-proof strong box. Make copies of your documents and store those in a safe location away from your home.

And one more thing experts advise: Don't forget cash. Cash works when loss of electricity renders useless your ATM and credit cards. They say you should withdraw as much as you can as soon as you receive a warning that a natural disaster is pending, BEFORE the disaster actually strikes.

You will need all of the cash you can withdraw in case you need to buy supplies at post-disaster prices, which can be inflated. Once the danger has passed and you can return home, put the money you haven't spent back in the bank.

Reprinted with permission from LFE Institute, Inc. Visit them online at www.lfeinstitute.com.