

Emergencies: Are You Prepared? Your Personal Checklist of Important Documents

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Be Prepared!

Life's emergency situations require advance preparation and planning. The first step is organizing your papers and communicating with appropriate individuals. Do you have an appropriate place for each document? Have you told anyone else where you keep your vital information? And have you shared your wishes in the event of your death? Many situations require that you take action now to avoid financial problems later.

Natural Disasters

Wherever you live, there is always the risk of floods, fires, and other natural disasters that could result in the destruction of your home. Prepare yourself so that if such situations occur, you can minimize the impact. All sales receipts and contracts should be systematically filed for easy access when reporting a claim. The originals should be kept in a safe place, and a copy elsewhere, in case the originals are damaged or destroyed.

Theft

Theft of personal belongings can occur in an instant. Your purse could be stolen from your office at work, or your camera from your vehicle. Are you prepared for this? Do you have a list of all your credit card numbers on file, with the necessary contact information, so you can quickly report stolen cards before they are used unlawfully? Or do you at least have your most recent credit card statements, with account numbers and company contact information, where you can quickly get to them to make your report?

Sudden Illness

Contingency plans also may be needed for sudden injury or illness. If you were incapacitated, who would handle your affairs, and how would that person gain access to your important documents? Would they have durable power of attorney to act on your behalf? By making these plans ahead of time, you ease the stress your loved ones must face.

Contingency Plans

And what if, while traveling out of town or overseas, you discover you need to sell your stock? Prepare for your trip by leaving a durable power of attorney and by giving a trusted person access to your stock certificates so that he or she can sell the stock for you in a timely manner. This way you avoid having to cut your trip short. Also, in these troubling times of terrorism, a loved one might need your dental records in order to provide a positive identification of your remains; this might also be necessary in case of mechanical problems on an aircraft or structural failure of a building which results in your death.

Tax Records

Organizing your tax records not only makes tax preparation much easier, it also is essential in preparing for an audit. Supporting documents—such as bank statements, cancelled checks, credit card receipts and statements, and all other receipts and official information on income, losses, and deductions—should be available at all times. Consider going over this information with an accountant to explore possibilities for lowering your taxes in future years.

Get Organized

Your spouse and adult children—and any others who would need to handle your financial affairs—should know the location of all papers, contracts, documents, policies and other needed information. Each should know to whom to turn for advice in case of emergency.

The purpose of the forms that follow is to organize this information so that you, or others who might have to manage your affairs, know where to find all records and whom to contact, such as your lawyer, financial advisor, primary doctor, or dentist. It also can be used to create an effective filing system to manage your vital information. However, you might need additional or more comprehensive lists for credit cards and other items mentioned on our checklist. “Estate Planning: Your Records and Personal Information”

www.ext.vt.edu

is another Kentucky Cooperative Extension publication that you might use. You could develop your own list, or consult one of the many books created for this purpose. Such books are available from libraries, bookstores, Internet retailers, and office supply stores.

Ideally, you should keep a record of all significant purchases and property you own. Keep all Paid In Full statements for life, in case there is ever a question whether you have paid. A good way to keep records is to videotape each item as you buy it, speaking as you go about what the item is, its purchase date, how much you paid for it, whether there is an extended warranty, and what it is worth, and documentation of appraisal. This way you have an excellent record for insurance purposes and you increase your chances of recovering costs of lost, stolen, or damaged property. If the property is damaged or destroyed, you can also videotape it to show the extent of the damage.

Study the checklist with your spouse and others who need access to your personal information. We recommend using separate, “his and hers” checklists to account for all items. Analyze each point carefully and fill in your information. Consult the Location Code List to designate actual locations for all your original documents. For example, you might keep an original birth certificate in your safety deposit box and a copy in a portable fireproof box. Locations of originals and all copies should be noted on the list. Keep the list in a safe place known to your family.

Suggested Contents of Portable Fireproof Box

We recommend that you buy a portable fireproof box, if you don’t already have one; it should be large enough to hold files and a few valuables, but not so large that you can’t easily carry it out if you have a fire. Following are some of the items that you should keep in the box:

- List of insurance policies and contact information
- List of bank accounts and contact information
- List of debt obligations, due dates, and contact information
- Your family’s passports

- List of doctors and contact information
- List of medications, prescription numbers, and contact information of all pharmacies that you use
- Copy of durable power of attorney, living wills, and healthcare proxies – Yours and all those of which you are attorney-in-fact or healthcare surrogate
- Copy of each of your wills and all those of which you are the executor
- Safety deposit box keys
- List of investment, retirement, and bank accounts, with all contact information
- Your original Social Security card (when you’re not using it)

Finally, you should keep this checklist in your portable fireproof box. As you can see, much of the information on the list above is already called for elsewhere in the checklist. Keeping track of your vital information should be made as simple as possible. Don’t make it any harder than it has to be.

Again, keep the original checklist with your will so that your executor or personal representative has access to both. Give other copies of this checklist to individuals such as your lawyer or your close relatives who have copies of your important documents. Keep copies of documents such as wills and trust agreements in your portable fireproof box for easy access.

For Internet access to “Estate Planning: Your Records and Personal Information,” by Suzanne Badenhop (Kentucky Publication # FCS5-422), go to the following Web site:

<http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/fcs5/fcs5422/fcs5422.pdf>

For much more detailed inventory forms, go to the Household and Personal Property Inventory at the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service Web site:

<http://www.ag.uiuc.edu/%7Evista/abstracts/ahouseinv.html>

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Important Names, Addresses, and Phone Numbers

List the important names, addresses, phone numbers, and account or policy numbers that may help survivors in dealing with your affairs. Be sure to list an entry for each person or place noted on Your Checklist of Important Documents.

Location	Name	Address	Phone / Fax	Account / Policy Number
Attorney-In-Fact- Medical (Health Care Proxy)				
Attorney-In-Fact – Financial				
Auto Loan				
Bank A				
Bank B				
Bank C				
Credit Card				
Credit Card				
Credit Card				
Credit Contract/Loan				

Location	Name	Address	Phone / Fax	Account / Policy Number
Credit Contract/Loan				
Credit Contract/Loan				
Credit Union				
Current File Cabinets				
Permanent Records (Locations)				
Lawyer's Office				
Safety Deposit Box				
Stock Broker / Financial Advisor				
Individual Possessions				
Relative A				
Relative B				

Location	Name	Address	Phone / Fax	Account / Policy Number
Relative C				
Friend A				
Friend B				
Primary Care Physician				
Dentist				
Executor / Executrix				
Funeral Home				
Insurance Agent A Type:				
Insurance Agent B Type:				
Insurance Agent C Type:				

Your Personal Checklist of Important Documents

Document	Recommended Location Code	Location of Original	Location Code of Copy(s)
Appraisals of Personal Possessions	1		
Appraisals of Real Property	1		
Automobile Title	1		
Automobile Registration	9 (Car)		
Bank Statements—Current Year	2		
Bank Statements—Last 3 Years	2		
Birth Certificates/Adoption Papers	1		
Burial Plot Papers	1		
Charge Account Records	2		
Checkbook Records, Including Canceled Checks (for 3 years)	2		
Credit Card Statements (for 3 years)	2		
Debt Contracts (until expiration); Payment in Full Notices (for life)	1		
Deeds—Current Property/Closing Statements, Bills for Improvements	1		
Deeds—Sold Property	2		
Divorce Papers	1		
Durable Power of Attorney	Original – 1 Copies – 3, 10, 11		
Educational Records/Diplomas/Transcripts	2		
Employment Papers/Information	2		
Funeral Plans	Original – 2 Copy - 11		

Location Code List

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 - Bank Safety Deposit Box | 6 - Relatives/Friends |
| 2 - Home File Cabinet (preferably fire-proof) | 7 - Primary Doctor=s Office |
| 3 - Lawyer's Office | 8 - Funeral Home |
| 4 - Broker/Bank | 9 - Other |
| 5 - Carry With You at All Times | 10 - Portable Fireproof Box |
| | 11 - Executor/Executrix or Attorney-In-Fact |

Document	Recommended Location Code	Location of Original	Location Code of Copy(s)
Healthcare Power of Attorney	Original – 1 Copies – 5, 7,10,11		
Household Inventory List/Video	1		
Insurance Papers—Medical	2		
Insurance Papers—Long-term Care	2		
Insurance Papers—Home/Property	2		
Insurance Papers—Automotive	2		
Insurance Papers—Liability (Umbrella Policy)	2		
Insurance Papers—Life	2		
Insurance Papers—Disability	2		
Investment Records—Bonds	Original – 4 or 1		
Investment Records—Stocks	Original – 4 or 1		
Investment Records—Others	2		
Letter of Last Instructions	Original – 2 Copies – 6, 11		
List of Medications	5		
Living Will	Original – 1 Copies – 2, 3, 7		
Marriage Certificates	1		
Medical Records	7		
Military/Discharge Papers	1		
Naturalization or Residency Papers	1		
Passport	1		
Power of Attorney	Original – 1 Copies – 2, 3, 11		
Prenuptial Agreements	1		
Religious Records	2		
Retirement/Pension Records	2		

Document	Recommended Location Code	Location of Original	Location Code of Copy(s)
Safety Deposit Box Location	2		
Safety Deposit Box Key	Original – 10 Copy – 11		
Social Security Card	Original – 1 Copy – 10		
Tax Returns & Supporting Documents – Current Year	2		
Tax Returns & Supporting Documents – Previous 3 Years	2		
Tax Returns & Supporting Documents – 3–6 Years Old	2		
Trust Documents	Original – 1 Copy – 2, 3, 9 (trustee)		
Warranties, Guarantees	2		
Wills	Original – 1 Copies – 2, 3, 11		