



FINANCIAL / TAX ADVICE

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Hurricane Preparedness And Document Retention

In an earlier column, I addressed how long each of us should keep our personal records. Assembling your personal records in a location and format protected from hurricane and disasters is also paramount.

Hurricane preparedness can be quickly summarized in the following steps:

1. Determine your risk.
2. Develop your personalized evacuation plan.
3. Make sure your insurance coverage is up to date.
4. Assemble all disaster supplies.
5. Reinforce your home and business.
6. Identify and protect your trusted sources of information.
7. Create a written plan for you and your family.

The essential records to be safeguarded in the event of an actual disaster are by their nature limited in volume and must be the key items you need in the event you are adversely affected. While tax papers are important, they are generally not the first items to be safeguarded. Certain documents should be retained in a safe deposit box yet be available if they are immediately required. The following are just suggestions, and may not be inclusive, of everything you might personally need to retain:

Items to be retained in a safe deposit box:

Adoption papers, birth certificates, certificates of citizenship, death certificates, copy of driver's licenses and family history, fingerprints of young children, marriage certificates, copy of passport, religious papers, social security card, and voter's registration. Original wills, trusts, life insurance policies, property insurance and casualty insurance policies, inventory of household goods, titles to automobiles, plus important business and personal contracts.

Documents to be kept in a portable disaster proof firebox:

Copies of deeds, property and life

insurance policies, important personal and business contacts, medical related papers and prescriptions, automobile registrations, copy of credit cards, bank documents, brokerage accounts, one year's tax returns, medical information and insurance cards, school information for children, government benefits including Social Security card and benefit statements.

The key concept is that documents retained in a home office are not safe in the event of disaster. They are often not readily available when needed. Documents absolutely essential in the event of an actual disaster should be placed in a safe deposit box. Those documents you might need to work your way through a natural disaster, or to help your family, should be retained in a portable protected firebox. You should also have an adequate amount of cash for your expected needs for at least two (2) weeks, multiple credit cards, and checks from bank accounts funded to see you through an extended natural disaster.

Plan ahead by thinking what documents you will need if you were displaced from your residence for an extended period of time. It is always easier to make copies of important documents, rather than having to reconstruct them by remembering who might have copies or trying to remember who your professional service advisors were when certain documents were prepared. Consult your legal and tax advisor to determine which documents can be retained by copy and which must be original. Electronic backups are always an excellent strategy.

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