

Keeping a Household Inventory and Protecting Valuable Records¹

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Introduction

A disaster strikes. Your home and possessions are destroyed. Will you be able to pick up the pieces? You will, if you do both of the following:

1. Keep an up-to-date household inventory
2. Keep the inventory and other valuable documents in a secure location

This publication provides details about these two tasks.

Keeping a Household Inventory

An up-to-date household inventory is a valuable resource. Before a disaster, the inventory will help you determine whether you have enough insurance to cover the contents of your home. After the disaster, the inventory will help prove the value of the damaged or destroyed possessions for insurance or tax deduction purposes.

An inventory consists of the following:

- A description of each item (include brand name, model, and serial number)
- When you bought the item (if you cannot remember, give an approximate date)
- Where you bought the item
- How much the item costs (include how much you paid for it, how much it is currently worth, and how much it would cost to replace it)

It is highly recommended to have photos and/or a video to accompany your inventory.

Do not forget less expensive items, such as clothes and linens. It will be costly to replace these items entirely. Be thorough—inventory your home room-by-room and do not forget to include items in closets, lawn furniture, and tools in the garage. Keep the inventory up-to-date.

There are computer software programs to assist you in this task.

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The University of Illinois, College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences provides an excellent guide and relevant forms for conducting a household inventory. Access the guide online at <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/vista/abstracts/ahouseinv.html>.

The Florida Office of Insurance Regulation is a good source for household inventory forms. Access the forms online at http://www.floir.com/siteDocuments/InventoryChecklist_6-26-08.pdf.

Key Facts about Flood Recovery: <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/11948/>

Flooding: <http://www.ready.gov/floods>

Hurricanes: <http://www.ready.gov/hurricanes>

Tropical Cyclones: a Preparedness Guide (NOAA/PA ; 201152). National Weather Service. Access online at <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/16125>

Protecting Valuable Records

The key to a smooth recovery is documentation. Secure your valuable papers in a waterproof, fireproof container.

Table 1 is a list of the valuable papers that need to be in a safe deposit box at a secured location outside of the home, such as a bank, especially in preparation for a disaster such as a hurricane. Table 2 is a list of valuable papers that you need to always keep in your possession at home in a waterproof, fireproof, locked box.

Additional copies of valuable records should be in the care of a lawyer, the future administrator of your will, a business associate, and/or a trusted family member residing outside of your home.

Sources for This Publication

Before Disaster Strikes: How to make sure you're financially prepared to deal with a natural disaster (FEMA Publication 291E). American Red Cross, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and National Endowment for Financial Education.

Household and Personal Property Inventory Book (Circular 1346). University of Illinois, College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences.

Home Inventory Checklist. Florida Office of Insurance Regulation. Access online at http://www.floir.com/siteDocuments/InventoryChecklist_6-26-08.pdf

Flood Damage Checklist: <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/ageng/structu/de1519.pdf>

Flood Damage Checklist (Red Cross): http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4340128_Flood.pdf

Key Facts about Flood Readiness: <http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/readiness.html>

Table 1. Valuable papers to keep in your safe deposit box.

Property	
1.	Property records (deeds, titles, leases)
2.	Household inventory
3.	Home improvement records
4.	Automobile title and bill of sale
5.	Copyrights and patents
6.	Certificates for stocks, bonds, etc.
Financial	
1.	Income tax returns
2.	Contracts (including promissory notes)
3.	Copies of insurance policies
4.	Important receipts and bills of sale
5.	Supporting documentation for large transactions, unusual losses, or deductions
Identification	
1.	Social Security cards
2.	Citizenship papers
3.	Passports
4.	Birth certificates
5.	Marriage certificates
6.	Death certificates
Other	
1.	Divorce decrees
2.	Adoption/Custody papers
3.	Military service records
4.	Retirement papers
5.	Religious records
6.	Copies of your and your partner's wills
7.	Trust agreements, living wills, powers of attorney, and health care powers of attorney

Table 2. Valuable papers to keep at home in a waterproof, fire proof locked box.

General	
1.	Safe deposit box keys
2.	Safe deposit records and inventory of items
3.	List of emergency contacts (doctors, veterinarians, financial advisors, clergy, reputable repair contractors, and family members)
Property	
1.	Rental property records
2.	Guarantees and warranties
3.	Appliance/Electronics manuals
4.	Copies of insurance policies
Financial	
1.	Income tax returns
2.	Current bank balances
3.	Loan payment books
4.	Employee benefits
5.	Bank account, loan, credit card, investment account numbers
Identification	
1.	Social Security numbers
2.	Driver license numbers
3.	Copies of citizenship papers
4.	Copies of birth certificates
5.	Copies of marriage certificates
6.	Educational records
Health	
1.	Health records
2.	Copies of immunization records
3.	Copies of prescriptions for medicines and eyeglasses
4.	Copies of veterinary/vaccination records
5.	Health, dental, or prescription insurance cards