

YES it can happen to YOU

If a natural disaster displaces you from your home, will you be ready? How to disaster-prepare your financial life

Three years after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, natural disasters in the United States seem to be more frequent and severe than ever. Wildfires in California, tornadoes in the Midwest and floods nationwide prove that no corner of the country is immune to catastrophe.

Your financial survival kit

If you and your loved ones had just a few minutes to evacuate your home, would you know which financial tools and documents to take with you? Experts recommend having all of the following organized and ready in case of emergency:

- Identification cards
- Credit cards and ATM/debit cards
- Checkbook with blank checks to last about a month
- Cash – the farther you live from a reliable ATM, the more you'll need
- Phone numbers of your financial service providers
- Account numbers to your checking, savings and investment accounts
- Photos, serial numbers and appraisals of valuable household items
- Keys to your safe deposit box

Store originals of your most important documents — such as birth and death certificates, passports, and deeds and titles to houses and cars — in either a bank's safe deposit box or in a portable, fireproof records box in your home.

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Before putting these originals in either box, make several copies of each document and store the copies into clear, locking plastic bags. Store the bags safely in your home with your other "financial essentials."

There's another class of documents you might want to take with you in an evacuation: Those relating to insurance policies, mortgages, investments, bank accounts, credit cards, and employee benefits.

While chances are good that the company providing you these financial services has all these documents in its system, it's wise to check first with those companies before assuming anything. Also confirm

with your attorney that you can get copies on request of any document he or she has prepared for you.

And don't forget to ...

Once you've prepared your financial survival kit and safely stored your original documents, there's still more to do:

- Confirm with your insurance agents what type of disaster coverage each of your policies provides. Many homeowner's policies, for example, don't cover flood or earthquake damage.
- If your pay isn't deposited electronically into your bank account, make the switch to direct deposit now.
- Register for online access to all your financial accounts.
- Ensure that you and your domestic partner both know where to find all your key documents, account numbers and phone numbers.

Make a mid-year resolution

Don't put off these preparations. Make a mid-year resolution to complete them by December 31.

Remember, when disaster strikes, it's much harder to stay calm and organize your documents. A little preparation now might pay big dividends later. ■