

Step 2: Create a grab and go kit for your important documents!

In Step One, your family put together an emergency plan. Everyone in the household now knows where to meet in case of an emergency at home and away from home, when communication systems are out, who to call outside of the area to let family members know where you are and that you are ok. Hopefully, everyone is now carrying an information card in their wallet? Today is a good time to start! You can access the info on this site at www.palmspringsneighborhoods.com. Look on the blue band for Step by Step Emergency Preparedness.

Continuing with preparations for any disaster, in this step we are going to put our important papers together into a **grab and go kit**. Organizing papers 'before' can make 'after' easier. Think about all the time you will spend waiting in line at multiple government agencies (DMV, Social Security, Birth Records, etc.) to replace all those important documents. Pretty convincing! Having these papers in your hand will make your life so much easier when you need to access information under less than ideal conditions.

Below are suggestions from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the American Red Cross and financial and insurance experts. Use these as guidelines to help you build a list of important documents for your household. It is important to remember that these kinds of documents will need to be assembled for every member of your household! Attached is a form to assist you in documenting information.

Keep your documents safe! Store original documents in a safety deposit box or other secure, fire and water proof container. Chances are good they will be there after a disaster. If not, or if it takes a while to get into the safe deposit box, you will have a complete set of copies of these same documents in a waterproof, fireproof kit that is easy to grab when getting out of the house in a rush. Another way of storing the information is scanning and saving these important documents on a USB flash drive, compact disc (CD) or Digital Video Disc (DVD) which is easy to store and is portable. Finally, consider saving them to a virtual file like Dropbox, Google Docs or iCloud. The most important step is to ensure that your most important information is stored in a safe and secure manner.

FEMA advises keeping insurance policies, property records and deeds, stocks, bonds, birth certificates, social security cards and other critical documents in a safe deposit box. Add to that a copy of your will. Paper copies of these documents, past tax returns and photos/videos of valuables can all be stored in the same fireproof, waterproof container for quick access in case of emergency.

Standard Proof of Identification: Keep a photocopy of your photo IDs, driver's license, social security cards, birth certificates and passports with your crucial documents.

Bank, brokerage and credit card information: Make a list of all of your bank, brokerage and credit card accounts with your account number and a phone number for each. Make sure you know the main bank phone number (toll free line) as well as your local branch. Whether or not your bank is "working" during the recovery phase of a disaster, you may need to access your account or information from your account from a different state. This information will be critical when you need access to your money in the aftermath of a disaster.

Copy ALL of your property and medical insurance policies and insurance cards (medical, dental, pharmacy, auto, AAA, etc.): along with the 24-hour phone number for your insurance companies.

Do a **virtual photo tour** of your house and garage. In addition to photographs of the interior and exterior of your home, photograph your furniture and keepsakes. Save these photos on your thumb drive and a compact disc and put one in your safe deposit box and the other in the kit!

Children's School Records: Contact your child's school and ask for a copy of the latest school records. Update these records at the end of every school year. These will be very helpful if your child's school and records are destroyed in a disaster. Also, if your family has to relocate after a disaster, the records will be needed to enroll them in a new school.

Immunization records and other important medical records for the whole family--including your pets: Like school records, you may be asked to provide immunization records or other documents related to your health in order to get into a new school. Ask for a copy of your latest records at your annual doctor's visit.

Marriage certificates and custody decrees: These documents can be important in the case of an emergency. In the event you, your spouse or child are injured, these types of documents will be vital in case one of you needs to make medical or other important decisions about a family member's care. They can also be necessary if you and your children somehow get separated and you need to prove that you have legal custody.

Copy **personal photos** from your computer and albums onto a compact disc or thumb drive. Have you ever considered what you would do if you lost all your family photos. This is something important to consider because during Hurricane Katrina families lost everything including all their photo albums because of the flooding. If you have photos that you cannot replace because of age, no negatives (yes, photos used to be more than 0 and 1s). Family photos that cannot be replaced scan or digitize and keep them on a compact disk or thumb drive in your safe deposit box or other secure location.

Protect Yourself from ID Theft: If you find yourself evacuating your home for a natural disaster, identity theft might not be the first thing on your mind, but it is an issue. Keeping your key financial documents together in one place and taking them with you is an easy way to protect yourself. If you leave your home in a disaster, grab the important financial documents so that they are not at risk of being lost or stolen.

Your family's emergency plan: tuck the emergency plan you prepared in Step 1 into your important papers AND make a copy for all family members. Send a copy of the family's communication plan to school attached to your child's emergency contact form so that your child's school knows how to find your family.

If the power goes out ATM machines, credit cards, and gas pumps will not be operational. Keep a supply of small bills and coins in your grab and go kit. Make it a practice to refill your vehicle's gas tank between the half way and one quarter mark.

By planning ahead, having important personal tax and financial information easily accessible after a disaster will help make a rough time a little bit smoother when you have to put your life back together.

In the next step, we will continue to prepare, we will talk about food storage and 72-hour kits! This is a step by step process!

Let's get ready Palm Springs! Step by step, house by house, neighborhood by neighborhood!