

Disaster Relief: Preparing Your Evacuation "To-Go" Box



Are you prepared to evacuate quickly with important documents if disaster strikes? Natural disasters can strike suddenly. Taking time now to assemble important papers in a box that is safe and ready to go at a moment's notice can save a lot of time and frustration in the event of a fire, storm, or flood. Prepare now by creating a portable file you can grab to go.

Steps to Create Your Evacuation "To Go" Box Step 1

- Place items in paper folders or envelopes.
- Store these inside sealed, airtight, waterproof plastic bags.
- Place in a durable, sealed box, preferably a locking one. A portable, fireproof, waterproof box/bag is recommended.

Step 2

- Store the box/bag at home in a secure place you can get to easily.

Step 3

- If you must evacuate, grab the box and take it with you.
- Keep the box with you at all times.
- Do not leave the box unattended in your vehicle.

Include in Your "To Go" Box

- Cash for several days' living expenses.
- Rolls of quarters.
- Several blank checks from each checking account.
- Emergency phone numbers, email addresses, or other means of connecting.
 - Family/friends/neighbors
 - Employer
 - Landlord or mortgage company
 - Insurance agent (local and company headquarters)
 - Financial institutions
 - Credit card companies
 - Minister
 - School
 - Lawyer
 - Doctors
 - Pharmacies
 - Repair contractors

- Copies of these:
 - Homeowners, renter's, auto, and flood insurance policies and policy numbers
 - Life insurance policies for household members
 - All medical insurance policies and cards (front/back) for household members
 - Prescriptions for medications and eyeglasses
 - Pet insurance policy
 - Vital records (birth, death, adoption, marriage certificates)
 - Social Security cards for household members
 - Driver's license (color copies) and other wallet cards
 - Passports (color copies) and/or other identity documents
 - Immunization records for household members
 - Immunization records for pets
 - School records for each child
 - Documents for child custody arrangements
 - Deeds and titles
 - Vehicle titles
 - Rental agreements
 - Wills and trust documents (power of attorney, healthcare directives/living will, letters of instruction)
 - All bank and brokerage accounts with account and phone numbers
 - Mortgage documents and other loan documents
 - Copies of all credit cards (front/back) and phone numbers for each company
 - Employee benefit documents
 - Tax returns for a minimum of 3 years
 - Military discharge papers
- Back-up of computerized financial records
- Labeled photos of family members
- Home inventory (printed and digital version if available)
- Location of safe deposit boxes (with key location) and names of authorized signatories
- Proof of pet ownership such as tag numbers, microchip information, or photos of you and family members with the pet(s)
- CD/flash drive of irreplaceable photos; data inventory of valuables
- List of all electronic access user IDs, passwords, and PINs

- List of debt obligations, due dates, and contact information
- List of contact information for advisors, personal representatives, trustees, guardians, doctors, dentists
- List of these numbers:
 - Social Security
 - Bank accounts
 - Loans
 - Credit card accounts
 - Driver's license
 - Investment accounts
 - Other accounts

A safe deposit box is recommended to store your original papers and other valuables. These boxes are located at your financial institutions. Note that most original documents should be stored in your safe deposit box.

Secure in Your Safe Deposit Box

- Deeds
- Titles
- Mortgages
- Birth, marriage, death certificates
- Adoption papers
- Child custody papers
- Copies of passports
- Military/veteran records
- Appraisals
- Leases and other contracts
- Stocks, bonds, and certificates of deposit
- Trust documents
- Copies of power of attorney, will/trust
- Insurance policies
- Home improvement records and receipts
- Household inventory (list, photos, and/or digital)
- Jewelry, precious medals, other collectibles, keepsakes

Backup and Digital Files

Store the contents of your “to go” box and safe deposit box on a secure, password-protected jump drive. You may also consider saving them to a service like Dropbox or Google Docs.

There are a number of productivity apps for mobile devices that make this easy by using your phone’s camera as a scanning device.

Capture electronic versions of your important documents. Back-up your computer to protect photos and other important electronic documents. Scan old photos to protect them from loss.

The most portable files for your “to go” box are digital files. Take the documents you have collected and scan them. Save these images to a flash drive, CD, or DVD to save space in your “to go” box. Also scan the contents of your safe deposit box and save to the same flash drive, CD, or DVD. Send a copy to a trusted friend or relative who lives at least 300 miles away. You may also want to provide your attorney with a copy of the CD in a sealed envelope to be opened with your permission if you become incapacitated.

Our lives are constantly changing when there are births, deaths, moves, marriages, divorces, and similar changes occurring. You may buy a new house, acquire real property, or sell some. The best evacuation “to go” box will not last forever. As things change, update the “to go” box and your safe deposit box by adding to or deleting your documentation. Review these materials at least annually. Planning and preparation can help the unexpected from becoming a harsh financial reality.

References

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