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Rescuing Family Records: A Disaster Planning Guide

A new manual, ***Rescuing Family Records: A Disaster Planning Guide***, is available from the Council of State Archivists (CoSA). Written by David Carmicheal, the state archivist of Georgia, this manual provides practical guidance to help individuals and families protect their most important legal documents and irreplaceable pieces of family history from loss during a disaster.

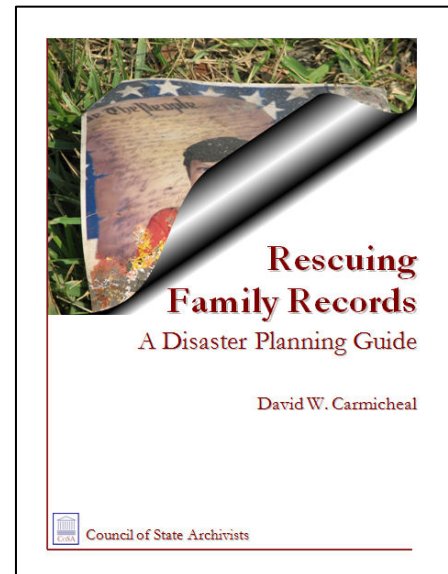
“Think of all the paperwork that marks your life's most important stages: birth certificate, diploma, marriage license and deeds and driver licenses and everything in between. Now, because of Katrina, thousands of critical records are gone.” That’s how Paula Zahn’s CNN.com report described the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina on September 16, 2005.

Rescuing Family Records describes the records that protect a family’s finances, health, civil rights, and family history. Some, such as deeds and mortgages, may be obvious to readers, but others, such as leases, proof of intellectual property, and certain tax records, are easily forgotten in the moment of crisis. The manual prompts readers to think through all the records that may help their family survive disaster and return to normal afterwards.

It includes:

- a checklist of records, with space for recording whether and where the record is duplicated;
- various options for duplicating and protecting records, and the pros and cons of each;
- a discussion about why certain records may need to be certified; and
- a brief introduction to caring for historical family records.

The book’s author, David Carmicheal, is Director of the Georgia Archives and led CoSA’s nationwide effort to better protect essential records after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. “As I talked to people who live in hurricane- and tornado-prone areas, they ask me what records their family should protect in the event of a disaster. Their concerns led to this manual.”



Families should think about records in advance of a disaster, according to Rex Wamsley, Director of the National Continuity of Operations Division of FEMA. “Disasters strike the United States every single day,” says Wamsley, “and while the effects of tornadoes or wildfires or floods may not be as widespread as Hurricane Katrina, they can be just as devastating on individuals and families.” According to Wamsley, records are key to protecting yourself during and after a disaster. “Imagine, for example, what happens if you evacuate and find yourself far from home with no medical history or record of medications. The results can be disastrous.”

The 24-page manual is available for \$10, plus \$3 postage and handling, from the Council of State Archivists, www.StateArchivists.org/prepare/families.htm. Proceeds will be used to support CoSA’s ongoing Emergency Preparedness Initiative.

The Council of State Archivists is a national organization that works to ensure that our nation’s historical records are valued, preserved, and widely used. To learn more about CoSA’s Emergency Preparedness Initiative and other CoSA projects, visit our website at www.statearchivists.org/ or contact Victoria Walch, Executive Director, Council of State Archivists, at (319) 338-0248 or vwalch@statearchivists.org.

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