



# **Rescuing Family Records**

## **A Disaster Planning Guide**

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Council of State Archivists

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## CONTENTS

1. Are You Prepared? .....	1
2. Records: Your Risk Reducers .....	3
3. Which Records Are Most Important? .....	5
4. Essential Records Checklist .....	7
5. How To Protect Family Records .....	17
Sources of Help .....	<i>inside back cover</i>

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## CHAPTER ONE ARE YOU PREPARED?

What if you were forced to evacuate your home with little notice? After days of travel you find yourself hundreds of miles from home with only the clothes on your back. You have a little money and a credit card or two. Your child is sick but you've forgotten to bring his prescription and can't remember anything about the pills except that he took them twice a day and they were tiny white things. The hospital wants proof that you're his parent before they'll treat him. And of course they want proof of insurance as well.

Somehow you manage to survive the first few days, but then those days turn into weeks. You decide to stay where you are for a while and put your child in school—anything to recover some sense of normalcy. Now the school wants proof that your child has had all of his required immunizations. You learn your home has been destroyed and your insurance company wants proof that you owned it and that your mortgage and tax payments were up to date. Unfortunately, you didn't bring your deed or mortgage along, and the courthouse that held the originals was destroyed in the disaster as well. You try to find a job, but prospective employers want to see proof that you actually graduated from college and all of your diplomas are gone with the house. Your ex-spouse chooses this moment to challenge the child custody settlement you reached two years ago; all proof of the agreement seems to have been swept away in the disaster.



## CHAPTER FOUR ESSENTIAL RECORDS CHECKLIST

The checklists that follow will help you prepare your family records for emergencies. Once you have completed the checklist, remember two things:

1. **Keep the checklist up to date.** Once a year, review your list to make certain it is still current. Choose a date that you'll remember, such as your birthday. One date you might use is May 1. Many archives review their own emergency plans on that day in an event called "MayDay" (a play on the traditional name for May 1 and the universal call of distress). Whatever date you choose, be sure to review your checklist annually.

2. **Take a copy of the checklist with you.** Don't forget to add a copy of the checklist to your "Grab and Go" records. It will prompt you to remember where your duplicate copies are and help you prioritize your record recovery in the event of a disaster.



## ESSENTIAL RECORDS CHECKLISTS

Record	Description and Comments	Category	Duplicates				
			Check here if not applicable (Do not duplicate)	May be duplicated by	Does duplicate need to be certified? (see p.18)	Location of duplicate	Last duplicated on:
<b>Banking information</b>	Checking and savings account numbers and routing numbers. Online account numbers, User ID, passwords.	Essential		Your bank or other financial institution.			
<b>Birth certificate</b>	A certified copy of each family member's official birth certificate.	Essential		The town, county, or state in which you were born. Check with the Town or County Clerk or the State department of vital statistics.	Yes		
<b>Checklist of essential family records</b>	A copy of the forms in this manual.	Essential					

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.

Paula Zahn CNN.com, Sept 16, 2005

Looking at the Hurricane Katrina disaster, consider a family from New Orleans who packed their car with all the belongings they could cram in and escaped to Houston. Whatever was not in their car was destroyed. Yet, if their car was serviced by Jiffy Lube in New Orleans, they could go to one in Houston and know exactly when they last changed the oil, the wipers, and rotated the tires. But they can't even begin to find out when they last had a tetanus shot; those paper records are gone.

Mike Gibbons, Missouri President Pro Tem, *Gibbons Capitol Report*, Jan 19, 2006

For City Hall records, Sterbcow said "it's the mortgages that's going to be ugly. To put it mildly, how are you going to be able to prove if you own a piece of property if your records are gone? How are you going to be able to prove you have a mortgage, or one is paid off?"

Marx Sterbcow, New Orleans Real Estate Attorney, quoted in "Storm ruins legal documents," by Greg Thomas, *Times-Picayune*, Sept 2, 2005



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