Having the right documents prepared before a disaster will make all the difference to your recovery afterward.
Many people do not think about gathering their important documents as part of preparing for a disaster. But if you need to seek emergency medical services, refill prescriptions from an unfamiliar provider, or file for disaster assistance, you will need verifying documents that will be hard to access in the days after a disaster.

This guide will walk you through commonly requested documents, how to store them, and where you can locate copies.
How To Use This Guide

Many of these documents are already on hand, it’s just a matter of identifying which documents apply to your household, gathering what you have, locating what you still need, and storing them in the same, secure, and easy-to-access place.

1. Review List of Important Documents
   Determine which documents will help your household recover from a disaster or apply for assistance

2. Gather
   Begin with the documents you have on hand, and then locate copies of documents you still need

3. Store
   Make sure all documents are securely stored and protected from possible water, fire, or other danger
Household Identification

**Documents:**
- Government Issued ID Card(s) or Driver’s License(s)
- Passport(s)
  - Social Security Card(s), Green Card(s), Military ID Card(s)
- Birth Certificate(s)
- Pet Ownership Paper(s) or Identification Tag(s)

**Recommended Storage:**
*Physical Copies*

**Where to Locate a Copy:**
- Your Local Department of Public Safety
- Your Local Passport Agency, U.S. Department of State
- The Vital Records Department in the State or County of the Birth
- Your Veterinarian

**Notes:**

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Household Medical Information

**Documents:**
- List of Medical Condition(s) Including Children & Pets
- List of All Prescription(s) Including Children & Pets
- List of All Allergies Including Children & Pets

**Where to Locate a Copy:**
- Your Physician(s), Pediatrician, Veterinarian
- Your Physician(s), Pharmacist, Pediatrician, Veterinarian
- Your Physician(s), Pediatrician, Veterinarian

**Recommended Storage:**
*Electronic Copies*

**Notes:**

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**Documents:**

**General:**
- Proof of Address

**Personal Property Inventory**
- Create List of Your Personal Property
  - Include details and pictures of home appliances, furniture, valuables, etc.

**Home/Rental Insurance Policy**
- Your Insurance Agent or Insurance Company
- The County Records Department
  - Where Your Property is Located

**Owner:**
- Deed for Your Home

**Mortgage**
- Including lender contact information and the homeowner’s name and pre-disaster address

**Renter:**
- Rental Lease
  - Including landlord contact information

**Recommended Storage:**
- Electronic Copies

**Where to Locate a Copy:**
- Copies of Recent Utility Bills
  - Electric, water, gas, cable/satellite, phone bill
  - Other official documents like mail from a child’s school, or vehicle insurance cards

- Your Insurance Agent or Insurance Company
- The County Records Department
  - Where Your Property is Located
- Your Mortgage Lender
- Your Landlord

**Notes:**
- Copies of Recent Utility Bills
  - Electric, water, gas, cable/satellite, phone bill
  - Other official documents like mail from a child’s school, or vehicle insurance cards

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**Documents:**

**Financial Documents**
- Checking/Saving Accounts, Retirement Accounts, Investment Accounts, Pension, Trust Documents, etc.

**Marriage Certificate**
- Records from the County where you married

**Living Will or Power of Attorney**
- Will, Transfer on Death Deeds, Insurance Policies

**Estate Planning Documents**
- Tax returns, pay stubs, government benefits, alimony, child support

**Loan Documents**
- Mortgage, Home Equity Line of Credit, Deed

**Military Service Records**
- Discharge Papers (DD-214), Dependent ID card(s), Veterans Health ID Card(s)

**Recommended Storage:**
- Electronic Copies

**Where to Locate a Copy:**
- Financial Institutions Where You Have Accounts
- The County Clerk Office
- Your Records or Personal Lawyer
- Prepare Prior to a Disaster Event
  - Create with the help of a lawyer OR file a Transfer on Death Deed
- Your Employer or Tax Preparer/Accountant
- Your Loan Provider
- Veterans Affairs or Dept. of Defense

**Notes:**
- Copies of Recent Utility Bills
  - Electric, water, gas, cable/satellite, phone bill
  - Other official documents like mail from a child’s school, or vehicle insurance cards
## Document Checklist

**Gather What You Need**

### Applies To My Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Type</th>
<th>Located</th>
<th>Stored</th>
<th>Where</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification Card or Driver's License</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>Passport(s)</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth Certificate(s)</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>List of Medical Condition(s)</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>List of all Prescriptions</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deed for Your Home</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rental Lease</td>
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<td>Tax &amp; Income Information</td>
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<td>- Trust Documents</td>
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### Notes:

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Storing Your Documents

Physical Copies

Keep your physical documents in a water-proof (zip lock bag) or fire-proof container. Make sure your documents are secure and easy to take with you.

Electronic Copies

Store electronic copies of your documents in a place that can be accessed from anywhere. This could be cloud storage, your email, USB drive, etc.

Safe Deposit Box

Keep important documents secure in a safe deposit box. You can rent a box from your local bank.

Storage Notes:

Recommendations for Securing Your Documents

- When you receive new/renewed policy or account documents, add them to your stored documents. Review and update documents once or twice a year
- Store all your important documents together in a secure location
  - Store your water and fire proof container on the highest floor in your home (avoid storing in a basement or garage)
  - Consider keeping a set of paper copies of your important documents with a trusted friend or relative
- If using a safe deposit box, confirm with your bank who has access if the owner cannot access it themselves. Designate who should have access, and share with them the name and location your bank, along with the box number, and contents of your safe deposit box
- Keep all electronic documents in the same location (email, cloud storage, external hard drive)
- Store documents in a password-protected format on a removable flash or external hard drive in your fireproof and waterproof box or safe. Consider using a secure offsite storage service
  - Visit www.us-cert.gov/ncas/tips/st04-019 to learn how to use electronic encryption to protect sensitive information
- If you choose a cloud storage system select a secure password that is memorable but not personal public information, like a birth date, phone number, or nickname
I’ve Gathered My Documents, Now What?

Well Done! Taking the initial step is the hardest part.

All you need to do now is keep your documents:

- **Secure**
  - Store your documents so they are safe from fire and water

- **Up-to-Date**
  - When you receive new/renewed policy or account documents, add them to your stored documents.
  - Make sure you have access to your most recent pay stubs

- **Accessible**
  - Store your important documents in a single location, both paper and electronic copies (i.e. email, cloud storage, external hard drive)
  - Take your documents with you if you need to evacuate or leave your home due to a disaster!

About This Project:

buildingcommunityWORKSHOP has developed disaster recovery guides to help support those recovering from a disaster event. The content in this guide was developed with the support of the American Red Cross.

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05 Documents You'll Need After a Disaster