

LOCUST VALLEY FIRE DEPARTMENT – PUBLIC SAFETY TIPS



Disaster-Proofing Your Mementos

A disaster can destroy family treasures and important documents in an instant. Here are some steps to protect those personal items that mean the most to you.

Every year, hurricanes, wildfires, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes strike with little or no warning and rob survivors of personal valuables, family mementos, and important documents. Insurance companies and government agencies stand ready to help survivors rebuild homes and replace certain material possessions. But unfortunately, they cannot replace the keepsakes that comfort and rekindle spirits in the wake of such disasters.

Several years back, a California wildfire forced my family to flee our home with no time to take a lifetime's accumulation of photographs, mementos, and personal papers. Although grateful that we escaped unharmed, at the time we agonized over how we would get through if we lost those items. Besides documents and computer files, some effects we'd miss most were family photos, our children's first works of art, and a collection of personal papers. Fortunately, the wildfire spared our home. However, realizing that we might not be so fortunate in the future, the experience triggered us to put a protection plan in place.

What follows are nine steps to help protect your personal items and important documents if disaster strikes:

- 1 Purchase a small, fireproof, watertight home safe to store items that require ready access.
- 2 Open a safe-deposit box at your bank for items that do not require immediate access.
- 3 Make photocopies or digital copies of photographs, important papers, insurance policies, love letters, favorite recipes, and kids' artwork and report cards. Consider storing these, along with photo negatives, at an off-site location.
- 4 Create a room-by-room written (or video) inventory of all your possessions. Include serial numbers, purchase date, and price, where applicable.
- 5 Maintain a list of secret passwords, access codes, personal identification numbers, the combination to your home safe (or the location of the spare key), and other confidential data. (Store this data in a secure location.)
- 6 Keep inventories of the contents of both your home safe and your safe-deposit box—in both locations.

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7 Create a “grab-and-go kit” that contains instructions for whom to call first, what to do first, and where to find things. The kit also should include:

- Family names, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, and medical information.
- Personal telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.
- An inventory of financial assets, and account and contact numbers.

8 Purchase portable file boxes from an office supply store for items such as tax records and other voluminous paperwork. Mark the tops and sides of the boxes “Take,” and store the boxes where they can be easily taken with you (time permitting).

9 Computer data should be backed up and stored with your original program files off-site.

No one likes to think about disasters. But if you’re prepared for one, you can help achieve some peace of mind, knowing that you have taken steps to protect your family treasures. •

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