



ESSENTIAL RECORDS FOR FAMILIES

What you need to know before you evacuate

Many tools exist to help families decide what to carry with them when they evacuate during an emergency. While most cover essentials such as food, water, and first aid materials, few discuss essential *records*, the records that protect your family's health, identity, and financial resources. The following information has been prepared by the Georgia Archives to assist you in planning for an emergency.

1. IDENTIFY THE RECORDS

Before an emergency occurs, decide which records are most essential to you and your family. The following guidelines will help you think about what is most important during an emergency.

Essential (Grab-and-Go) records: *During an emergency, some records are essential to protecting your health and safety; others will protect you financially in the event of a major property loss.*

- Backup of key computer records
- Bank account information (including online account User ID and password)
- Birth certificates*
- Contracts, leases, and other agreements that obligate others to make payments to you
- Driver's license
- Immunization records
- Insurance records (dental, disability, health, life, property, vehicles)
- Medical history/records (including list of allergies, medical conditions and current medications, and history of medical emergencies and hospitalizations)
- Pet records (shots, medical history, registration papers)
- Photo identification (for persons without a driver's license)
- Social Security cards

High-Risk records: *In a rapid evacuation it may not be possible to carry away every essential record. As you decide what to evacuate, one factor to consider is how readily a lost record could be replaced. The loss of any of the following records could result in major financial or personal damage, but many are duplicated by governments or financial institutions and so may be replaceable. There is one other factor to consider, though: unless the duplicate record is stored far away, it too could be destroyed during a widespread disaster. Courthouses and banks are not immune to hurricanes, fires, and floods.*

- Adoption records*
- Child support and alimony settlements/payments
- Divorce settlement records*
- Income tax records



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- Leases (rental properties, storage facilities)
- Marriage certificate*
- Mortgage
- Motor vehicle and vessel titles
- Passports
- Proof of intellectual property (copyrights)
- Property deed(s)*
- Records of current legal proceedings (probate, civil, criminal)
- Records of donations and contributions
- Records of educational attainment (transcripts, diplomas)
- Records of household improvements (for insurance purposes)
- Records of loans and loan payments
- Records of recent work history and income (Social Security, payroll)
- Stock certificates, certificates of deposit, bonds, other banking and investing records
- Will, other estate records*

Irreplaceable records: *Some records cannot be replaced if lost during a disaster.*

- Family photos and historical documents
- Inventory of household goods

2. PREPARE THE RECORDS

There are many ways to prepare your essential records for an emergency. The chart at the end of this leaflet lists several possibilities.

Whatever method you use, remember to keep your records up to date. Ideally, all records will be updated as soon as older ones become outdated. At the very least, though, choose one day each year and review your essential records to make certain they are current and ready to evacuate. Many archives do this each year during an event called “MayDay”. It’s held on May 1, and it’s an easy way to remember to review your plans and make corrections as needed.

3. GET MORE INFORMATION

For more information, visit the Georgia Archives website at www.sos.ga.gov/archives. Select *General Public* and then *Caring for Records* for helpful hints and technical leaflets.

*A word about *legally-admissible copies*: Copies of certain essential records—those that may be required in court or as proof of identity—are not normally accepted as “legally-admissible” unless they are *certified* copies. A photocopy or printout of a birth certificate, for instance, is not considered legal proof of birth in most states unless the copy is certified by the government agency that issued the document. Don’t confuse *certified* with *notarized*. Notarized copies do not have the same legal standing as certified copies.

METHODS OF PROTECTING ESSENTIAL RECORDS

METHOD		ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Ready-to-evacuate original records	Keep the original records together in a ready-to-evacuate container, such as a plastic file box.	At the time of evacuation you will know that you have the most current copy of your records at hand. There is no need to 'refresh' them as they go out of date.	Emergencies can occur at any time, even when you are not home to retrieve your ready-to-evacuate container.
Duplicate paper copies	Make duplicate photocopies of your essential records. Keep them together, ready to evacuate, or send them to a trusted friend or relative who lives at least 100 miles away.	If you mail copies to a trusted friend or relative, they will be safe even if the emergency occurs while you are away from home and unable to retrieve original records.	It is necessary to "refresh" your copies as the originals change and go out of date. Mailing them away can become time-consuming and expensive. Mailing them also exposes your personal information to accidental loss.
Duplicate electronic copies	Scan your essential records and store them on CD, DVD, or a Flash Drive. Carry the device with you, or send it to a trusted friend or relative who lives at least 100 miles away.	Electronic storage devices, such as CD, DVD, or a Flash Drive, are easy to carry wherever you go, even when you're far from home. They are easy to mail if you decide to send them to a trusted friend or relative. Electronic devices are also useful for storing family photos and historical documents as well as photographs of key household possessions. Files can be password protected to prevent an unauthorized person from accessing the information. In fact, 'biometric' flash drives can limit access to people with authorized fingerprints.	It is necessary to "refresh" your copies as the originals change and go out of date. Mailing them away can expose your personal information to accidental loss, although password protected electronic devices are generally safe. <i>Remember:</i> CDs, DVDs, and Flash Drives can fail! Test your backup devices at least once every three months, and copy all the information from one disk/device to another at least once a year.
Combination	Use a combination of these three methods. Duplicate copies (paper or electronic) work well for records that change infrequently while the originals of frequently-changing essential records might be kept together for rapid evacuation.		Using the three methods in combination can minimize the disadvantages listed above.