



Vital Records Protection for Families

Emergencies can occur at any time. They can be confined to a small area or cause destruction over a large area of the state or country. Planning now for how your family will respond to emergencies large and small can increase your safety and even reduce the amount of time it takes to return to normal in the aftermath. For important information on personal preparedness for all emergencies, please consult readync.org.

When planning for emergencies, remember to include protection of vital records as part of your response plan. Among other things, vital records can protect your rights, secure your health, and document your financial assets. Identifying the types of documents you have is the first step in protecting them.

Essential records are those you would need immediately after an emergency, particularly if you have to evacuate your home at a moment's notice. Essential records may include: birth certificate, medical records, Social Security card, driver's license or other identification, insurance records, bank account information, contracts or leases, pet records, and backups of important computer records. High risk records are those that protect your financial and legal assets. While they may be duplicated elsewhere, including at government offices, a loss of these records from all sources would prove severe. They may include: legal records (such as adoptions, divorce settlements, child support and alimony records), property deeds, leases, marriage certificate, military service records, mortgage records, motor vehicle titles, passport, will and estate records, investment records, diplomas and other educational certificates, income tax records, and documentation of household goods. Historically important records are items that are irreplaceable to you or your family. They may include: family documents, Bibles, letters, memorabilia, photographs, and scrapbooks.

The following guidelines will help protect your family records:

- Before an emergency occurs, determine which records are essential, high risk, and historically important to you and your family.
- Make duplicates of your vital records and store them in a safe place outside of your home. Some people utilize both paper and electronic duplicates.
- Regardless of format, it is always important to remember that the duplicates need to be refreshed as the originals change. Electronic storage devices need to be tested regularly to be sure they haven't failed and your electronic files are accessible.
- Create an inventory of record types and note how they are protected and/or duplicated. Review the list regularly and make sure that the most recent copies of each item are protected.

- Create a "grab and go" folder or box containing your records and locate it in a place in your home that you'll be able to access easily and quickly in case of an emergency.
- Historically important family records often are irreplaceable. Protection of these items will depend on the quantity and format of the originals. Some items may need to be part of your "grab and go" pack. While you always want to protect the originals, you may not be able to take all items with you in an emergency. Making duplicate images of some valuable documents and images would at least preserve copies of the originals.

Additional Information

If you would like additional information on preparing to protect your vital records in the event of an emergency, please contact the Preservation Officer at the State Archives of North Carolina at (919) 807-7308 or Jennifer.Blomberg@ncdcr.gov