

Emergency Contacts and Important Documents

Disaster can strike at any time. Two often overlooked components of emergency preparedness are emergency contacts and important documents. Your emergency contact could potentially save your life. This person may be called on to make life or death decisions on your behalf. They should know your medical history and have legal power to act on your behalf. They should also be able to communicate your situation to others. Emergency contacts should include names, phone numbers, addresses and relationship. Identifying your emergency contact on your cell phone will make this information available to first responders in situations where you are incapacitated. Directions on how to set emergency contacts will vary by cell phone model but can easily be found on the internet.

While your important documents aren't going to save your life, having access to them once you've survived the catastrophic event will make recovery much smoother. Replacing your id, credit, debit and health insurance cards will be easier if you have copies of these items and contact phone number readily available. If your home, income or vehicles are impacted by a disaster, you will likely need documentation to request assistance from insurance providers and government assistance programs.

Here's a list of some of the documents you should consider including:

- Birth, marriage, divorce and adoption certificates
- Passport, driver's license and social security card
- Military service identification
- Pet microchip numbers and a current photo of pet
- Mortgage documents
- Real estate titles and deeds
- Motor vehicle loan documents, titles and VINs
- Retirement, pension and investment account information
- Disability documentation
- Bank account numbers
- Credit card account numbers and contact information
- Insurance policy contact information
- Health insurance cards
- List of medications and pharmacy contact information
- Will, living will, medical power of attorney

In order to save space, the majority of these documents can be stored digitally on a flash drive, a hard drive or with a secure cloud-based service. All documents and flash or hard drives should be stored in a waterproof and fireproof container in your home, in a bank safe deposit box, or with a trusted friend or relative. At a minimum, paper copies of your ID and emergency contacts should be included in your go bag. These can be laminated or stored in waterproof pouches or cases, vacuum sealed bags or even a thicker ziploc bag. Access to a physical copy of your emergency contacts may be vital if your phone is lost or damaged.

Preparing for a disaster can be overwhelming, but taking the time now to gather your important documents and to identify your emergency contacts can make a potentially stressful situation more manageable.