

Survivors Speak: Strategies for preparing your home inventory

1) Keep a claim diary and stay organized: Set up a special section of your claim diary for contents and personal property.

- Save receipts for everything you buy that replaces your personal property.
- It helps to organize by category now for ease in locating these receipts later (e.g., clothing, shoes, kitchen items, furniture, toys, etc.) You may need these later in order to claim full replacement value of items.
- You may also wish to use these same categories on your contents list or spreadsheet for easy tracking.

2) Set up your Spreadsheet. Create your own spreadsheet, [use a spreadsheet found online](#) or use one provided by your insurance adjuster. Check your policy language for what is specifically required to document your loss. Most insurers ask for more information than is required in your policy, you need only provide additional information if it will help bolster your claim values.

It is helpful to have the following columns:

- Item Quantity, Item Description, Age, Condition, Replacement Cost - **Often Required**
- Item Number (useful for checking if all your items were included when returned from insurer)
- Category, Sub-category, Room/Location - these columns are great to have while you are creating your claim spreadsheet as it will allow you to sort your list depending upon your purpose.

3) Never intentionally claim items you did not have. Claiming items you did not have can jeopardize your entire claim and subject you to severe legal penalties.

4) Be Systematic and Strategic.

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Source: <https://uphelp.org/claim-guidance-publications/survivors-speak-strategies-for-preparing-your-home-inventory/> Date:

July 27, 2024

You have two basic tasks – **BRAINSTORMING and DETERMINING VALUE**

Brainstorm by room. Enter item descriptions into the spreadsheet. Visualize yourself in each room. What was on the north wall – furniture, artwork, etc.? What was in the drawers/cabinets of the furniture? Take one room at a time if you need to. Look at pictures; get friends to help. Begin to label your items by category and sub-category in the appropriate columns of your spreadsheet as you brainstorm.

Determine value by category. Sort your brainstormed list by category (then by sub-category) to make your pricing time-efficient. (If you are pricing furniture, it helps to do all your furniture at once. The same goes for other categories. This way you can go on one website at a time and get many items priced.) List your replacement values in the appropriate column. If you priced your furniture on a website, type that URL right there in the item description cell or alternatively, you may print off the supporting document which includes the description, picture, and price that is currently available. Note: Doing so will ensure that the documentation you provided will make it easier to accept the value and harder to lowball the RCV or excessively depreciate the item.

5) Keep a notepad on you. You may remember items for your inventory while shopping, stuck in traffic or in the middle of the night. If you have a notepad on you, you can write it down to add to your inventory next time you work on it.

6) Hints for Estimating Quantities and Values of Items in Bulk:

Dress Shirts – Suppose you had enough dress shirts to fill up 30 inches of closet space when they were snugly hung together. Go to your friend’s closet or a store rack and arrange those shirts as yours were. Count them and find an average price. Maybe you had 30 shirts @ \$40; 15 shirts @ \$60.

Books and CDs – You can price by the linear foot.

- CDs are generally \$12 – \$15. You stored them on shelves or in stacks. How many feet did you have? How many in a foot?
- Book prices vary by type, but are quite consistent within a type.
- At a large bookstore one can measure shelves, noting how many of each type of book fit on a 3-foot shelf and what the average price is for each type.

Similar procedures can be followed for other bulk items (e.g., other clothing, DVDs, maps, etc.) Again, be careful not to undervalue your belongings, as the insurer will apply depreciation automatically.

7) Take advantage of technology. Use websites to make “mock shopping lists” for pricing items. Save .pdf copies of all of these “shopping lists” to a thumb drive and mail it to your adjuster when you submit your contents spreadsheet or fax a packet. Be sure to keep copies of EVERYTHING for your records with a note of the date sent.

You can also use gift registry scanners in large stores to document your lost property. You will be able to print out the list and submit it as documentation to your adjuster. This is a great tool that can save you enormous amounts of time. You can simply walk through stores in person with a scanner or online to compute a detailed list of replacement values to submit to the insurer. This can be used in addition to the items on your spreadsheet as a stand-alone section, which saves you the trouble of entering each item onto your spreadsheet.

8) Use credit card statements and other records. Your credit card company can send you statements from previous years. These records can help you remember items you had purchased and will list the price you paid. Stores you frequently shop at may also have records of your purchases if they have a membership/rewards program or if you had a credit card with them.

9) Enlist the help of friends and relatives to help you complete your inventory.

Many people ask how they can help after a catastrophic loss. Let close friends and relatives help you complete the massive task of the personal property inventory. Give a friend a list of items that need to be researched, valued and documented. Friends and family may have photos taken inside your home that will help jog your memory and serve as proof to your insurer.

10) Network, Network, Network. Seek out others who’ve navigated a major insurance claim settlement in the past or are working on one currently. Learn from them. Share information with them. Find out what they’re being told by insurance adjusters and claim professionals. Experience has clearly shown that united, educated policyholders get faster, fairer settlements. Networking and communicating with others who are recovering and insured with the same company as you are is extremely helpful.

Reality Check: An excerpt from “A Gentleman in Moscow”, by Amor Towles

“From the earliest age, we must learn to say good-bye to friends and family. We see our parents and siblings off at the station; we visit cousins, attend schools, join the regiment; we marry, or travel abroad. It is part of the human experience that we are constantly gripping a good fellow by the shoulders and wishing him well, taking comfort from the notion that we will hear word of him soon enough. But experience is less likely to teach us how to bid our dearest possessions adieu. And if it were to? We wouldn’t welcome the education. For eventually, we come to hold our dearest possessions more closely than we hold our friends. We carry them from place to place, often at considerable expense and inconvenience; we dust and polish their surfaces and reprimand children for playing too roughly in their vicinity – all the while, allowing memories to invest them with greater and greater importance. This armoire, we are prone to recall, is the very one in which we hid as a boy; and it was these silver candelabra that lined our table on Christmas Eve; and it was with this handkerchief that she once dried her tears, et cetera, et cetera. Until we imagine that these carefully preserved possessions might give us genuine solace in the face of a lost companion. But, of course, a thing is just a thing”.

We thank and acknowledge Colorado Fire Survivors Chris Carlson and Corinne Lively for contributions to this [“Survivor’s Speak”](#) publication.

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