

Emergency Prep: Your money and preparing for debilitating financial disasters

Los Altos Town Crier

Residents of California know we should have an emergency preparedness kit and be ready for disasters such as earthquakes and wildfires. But have you thought about disaster preparedness for your finances? Take some steps now to organize important documents and plan how you'll access them after a disaster.

Documentation

What documents would you need to prove your identity, access your money, file an insurance claim, etc.? Some to consider:

- Driver's license, state identification card, military identification card
- Identification information for children: recent photos, identification cards or similar items
- Passport or Green Card
- Birth certificate, naturalization papers
- Social Security card
- Power of attorney, medical power of attorney, Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment document
- Medical insurance cards
- For retired military: copy of discharge form, DD-214
- Insurance claim information (including an inventory of valuables, photos of your home showing your furniture and belongings)
- Pet ownership record, pet vaccination records, certification papers for service animals
- Financial records, including mortgage payment information, other financial obligations, access to your investments and bank accounts

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Make a plan to enable accessing these documents during a disaster:

- Password-protected thumb drive
- Photocopies in a sealed plastic bag, in your Go Bag (remember that your Go Bag must be easy to grab and go but should be secure from theft)
- Stored secure in the cloud on the internet

Don't forget to consider your ability to access this information if there is no power, no internet or you can't enter your home.

Insurance

Do some research to decide whether you should change your insurance coverage. Your insurance agent should be able to help.

- Earthquake insurance. Residential policies do not cover earthquakes, so without earthquake insurance, you would be responsible for all the costs to replace belongings and rebuild or fix your home. Talk with your insurance agent about earthquake insurance coverage; visit the California Earthquake Authority at [EarthquakeAuthority.com](https://www.earthquakeauthority.com). The website has an online premium calculator so that you can get an idea of what this insurance may cost you.
- Wildfire insurance. Review your coverage with your insurance agent and discuss your eligibility for discounts for changing your roofing surface and other mitigation measures.

Some insurance companies will offer discounts; see bit.ly/firediscount.

You may get a discount (or even get canceled insurance reinstated) by forming a Firewise community with your neighbors. For more information, visit the Los Altos Hills County Fire District at bit.ly/FDfirewise.

- Flood insurance. Talk with your insurance agent or learn more at fema.gov/flood-insurance. Note: The city of Los Altos participates in the Community Rating System (CRS), which may qualify residents for discounted flood insurance premiums. The town of Los Altos Hills is not in CRS.
- Claim readiness. Compile the information you would need to file a claim (for example, home inventory and photos). Visit the United Policyholders website at [uphelp.org](https://www.uphelp.org) to learn more about buying insurance, preparing for a claim and other insurance information.