



Keep Financially Afloat If Disaster Strikes

This new century has already brought several disasters to Americans — Sept. 11, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Rita — to name a few. Today, many are still trying to rebuild their lives.

When disaster strikes, it is almost impossible to conduct business as usual. You and your family need to have a recovery plan in place — not only for personal safety, but for financial recovery.

If you had to vacate your home today because of a hurricane, flood or other disaster, do you have a plan in place for temporary housing and for paying your mortgage, car loan and other bills? Are your important papers and documents — such as insurance policies, Social Security cards, credit card and bank account numbers — where you can access either originals or copies?

Consider making copies of all important personal documents. Keep one set in a sealed waterproof container or bag, accessible in an emergency. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC) says that consumers should use caution when keeping this important information at home. You want to keep this information safe for you to carry away in a disaster, but not available for a thief to carry away during a burglary. A safe deposit box at your local bank is always a sound option.

Also consider sending one or two sets of these documents to trusted friends or family members for safekeeping. Rather than keeping paper copies, you may want to scan this information to computer disks for safekeeping. Be careful not to send this material to someone within close proximity to your home, who may face the same disaster situation. These documents would provide a starting point in the event you have to rebuild your identity or reconstruct your financial records.

Be sure you have enough checks with you to last a few weeks. Although many Americans today transact their financial business online, keeping your checking account number with you may be helpful if you need to make a payment over the phone.

Your debit card will be especially helpful during a disaster, because it will provide quick access to cash. Be sure you know your PIN number, but don't write it down. If a major disaster strikes, your bank may not be able to function as usual for a brief period, and you will need to have other financial options available if you cannot physically go to the bank for financial transactions.

Additionally, be sure to keep important phone numbers available, including numbers for your bank, credit card companies and insurance companies. You will need to contact these providers should you need to replace lost or stolen cards, open new accounts or need other assistance.

If you have not yet signed up for direct deposit for your paycheck or Social Security check, now is a good time to do so. By using direct deposit, you don't have to worry about getting important deposits to the bank during a disaster or rely on the mail, which may be interrupted during an emergency.

Your local bank is required by federal law to have an emergency plan in place in the event of a disaster. This includes plans to recover important financial data, to ensure cash availability and to function — even if key personnel are not available, if the bank is closed, or if phone or power service is down.

A word of caution to those of you who may not be involved in the actual disaster, but who want to help those who have been affected ... while disaster situations bring out the best in most people, they also bring out con artists who take advantage of good intentions. Be sure to give only to charities or organizations that you know are reputable. Never give cash, and never divulge your personal financial information.

This information is provided with the understanding that the Association is not engaged in rendering specific legal, accounting or other professional services. If specific expert assistance is required, the services of a professional should be sought.

*Provided as a public service by the **Indiana Bankers Association**.*