



May 24, 2011

## Hurricane Proof your Tax-related Documents

Hurricane season is just around the corner and it will do you good to prepare for it, especially if you live in hurricane-prone states near the Atlantic. One important thing to do would be to protect your tax-related documents. The IRS has always given guidelines for safeguarding these important documents.

1. Scan important tax documents like W-2s, tax return forms and other physical records into digital format. Back up these files and keep them in a separate location from your home. Alternatively, you may want to burn them onto a CD, DVD or other electronic storage medium and store them some place safe.
2. When considering where to keep these data, avoid keeping them near your home. When a hurricane strikes your home, the surrounding vicinity would likely be affected, too.
3. Obtain a disaster loss workbook for yourself or your businesses from the IRS to help you compile a list of your belongings or business equipment in your home or office. This could prove to be essential to prove the market value of your items in the event of an insurance claim.

4. You should keep photographs or video recordings of items that are valuable. And again, you should store these photographs and videos in a safe place away from your home or office.
5. Review your emergency plans annually because your circumstances will change, personal and business-wise. As an individual taxpayer, you should make sure you are saving all your important documents including W-2s, home closing statements and insurance records. When you hire new staff in your business or when your company undergoes certain changes, you should update your records accordingly and inform your employees of the changes.
6. Get the latest weather report to make earliest possible preparations. Use an NOAA Weather Radio if possible.
7. Contact the IRS in the event of a disaster. Call 1-866-562-5227 and speak to a specially trained IRS staff who will advise you in handling disaster-related issues.
8. If you have lost some of your tax-related records, you can retrieve copies of them from the IRS. You can obtain a copy of your tax return and Form W-2 when you submit a request using Form 4506. You can also request for a transcript of your return for free if you need information from there. Call (800) 829-1040 or submit Form 4506-T.
9. Finally, check out the following web pages on the IRS website for more specific information:

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=156138,00.html> – for disaster assistance and emergency relief (individuals and businesses)

<http://www.getirshelp.com/irsblog/>

<http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=152317,00.html> – for reconstruction of your records

<http://www.irs.gov/publications/p552/index.html> – for record keeping for Individuals (Pub 552)

<http://www.irs.gov/publications/p583/index.html> – for starting a business and record keeping (Pub 583)