



Protecting Your Wealth:  
HOW TO GUARD YOUR ASSETS  
DURING A NATURAL DISASTER



You've grown your income and built your wealth with discipline, hard work, and ambition. Yet it only takes one natural disaster, like a hurricane, to wash it away if you're not properly protected.

In just the first week following Hurricane Irma, Floridians filed more than 335,000 insurance claims for an estimated \$2 billion.

But it's about more than protecting tangible assets. In some cases, it's about safeguarding memories. It's about not letting a hurricane ruin your ability to DO more than protect your boat. Protect your ability to go out on that boat and have a few drinks with friends and watch the sunset.



## **1. Compile and store an inventory of your possessions.**

Taking a thorough inventory now will reduce the stress and frustration of trying to assemble a list from memory after the damage has already been done. It also reduces the likelihood you'll miss an important item for which you won't be reimbursed. Record the information by video, make a handwritten copy, or create a digital list you can then store securely in the cloud. If you make a paper copy, store it in an appropriate secure location. While a fireproof safe can be appropriate for everyday use, in a natural disaster, like a hurricane, it can get washed away in flooding.

At minimum, update the property inventory at least once each year so you can easily support a post-disaster insurance claim.

## **2. Don't overlook expensive everyday items during your inventory.**

From gaming computers and flat panel televisions to crystal chandeliers and restaurant-grade appliances, everyday items are often covered under standard homeowner's insurance policies. However, if you don't have a clear and defined inventory, the adjustors won't be able to properly account for them. Be sure to log these items and, in the case of electronics, record their serial numbers.

## **3. Arrange appraisals for your most valuable belongings.**

A professional eye is required to assign a monetary value to possessions that are costly or significant. In some cases, you may need to work with an experienced specialty valuation expert to ensure proper appraisals that allow you to obtain sufficient coverage for these often-irreplaceable items. Specialty items include valuables like jewelry, memorabilia, tapestries, rugs, fine wines, couture or vintage fashion, manuscripts, musical instruments, ceramics, and decorative arts.



#### **4. Take and store photos of your possessions and documents.**

Another way to safeguard your assets is to take photos of valuables, including documents, and store them in a secured cloud location. If you work with a financial planner, you may have access to secure storage for finance-related documents.

- ◆ Vital records, such as birth certificates and passports, or child custody papers
- ◆ Medical information, including health insurance and prescription information
- ◆ Insurance policies
- ◆ Property records, including written appraisals photos/video of your possessions
- ◆ Estate planning documents
- ◆ Financial records, including federal and state tax returns

#### **5. Keep your vehicles parked safely and filled with fuel.**

When you have advanced warning of a natural disaster like a hurricane or perhaps slower-moving wildfire, take the opportunity to fill the gas tanks of all vehicles you intend to use in case of evacuation. If you need to evacuate horses or towable vehicles (like boats), prepare by filling the truck with gas and hitching the trailer so it's ready to go when it's time to evacuate.

#### **6. Secure non-residence buildings or structures.**

In addition to your home, you may have features on your property that need protection, like pools, outbuildings, large garages, stables, gazebos, art studios, etc. As a storm approaches, take the same basic safety precautions as you would with your home, such as turning off utilities and boarding up windows.

Ask your insurer what your responsibilities are regarding the protection of these items during a hurricane or other natural disaster. For example, the policy might dictate you secure loose items or board up buildings.



### **7. Secure or dry-dock boats and personal watercraft.**

Hurricanes can significantly damage or destroy anything near the water. Before a hurricane strikes, plan how you'll secure boats, yachts, tenders, and other watercraft, preferable on high land well away from low-lying areas. Options include offsite dry rack storage or securing it within a building on your property.

### **8. Protect yourself against identity theft.**

Natural disasters don't just damage property—they also give opportunistic identity thieves a chance to steal your identity. If you can't store personal documents, like IDs or passports, in a secure offsite location, pack them into a portable lock box you can carry during an evacuation. If you have time before an evacuation, stop mail service so personal information doesn't sit in your mailbox where thieves can potentially access financial or credit card statements if you can't return home soon after the event.

### **9. Review your liability coverage.**

Many high net worth individuals are underinsured without realizing it. For example, as a homeowner, you may be held responsible for damage done to neighboring properties. Perhaps the storm blows a large dying branch off a tree you own, destroying a neighbor's four-car garage and the vintage cars inside. You can be held liable for damages. If the award amount exceeds your insurance policy, you'll be responsible for the difference.

An experienced insurance advisor will conduct a risk assessment to determine how much insurance coverage will safely protect your assets so you can start putting your life back together after a disaster. In some cases, you may need an umbrella policy to supplement needs that go beyond the limits of standard liability insurance.



## 10. Update your insurance policies.

Managing risk and controlling losses through regular insurance reviews is essential for protecting your wealth and speeding the recovery of property after a disaster. An insurance advisor will help identify costly gaps in coverage that could result in high out-of-pocket expenses.

You may need to add items to the policy or include amendments for potentially costly situations like sewage line breaks or non-flood-related water damage.

It's also wise to review and update insurance for your primary home. You may prefer to work with a specialized insurance program built to protect the unique needs of high-value homeowners; these can provide customized, comprehensive protection if your property is located in a hurricane-prone region. Review and update coverage for non-primary residence properties, as well, such as cabins, beach houses, or rental properties.

### Protect Your Identity & Money After a Disaster

Avoid post-disaster scammers—never provide personal data, such as birthdate or Social Security number, to anyone over phone, text, or email. If you donate money to a disaster-related charity, always check a resource like [IRS Nonprofit Charities Database to ensure the charity is legitimate.](#)

Analysis of true risk exposures, properly protected and classified, identify risk transfer strategies



## **General Resources.**

<http://www.ustrust.com/ust/pages/insights-on-wealth-and-worth-2016.aspx>

[http://www.ustrust.com/publish/content/application/pdf/GWMOL/USTp\\_Detailed\\_Findings\\_Deck\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ustrust.com/publish/content/application/pdf/GWMOL/USTp_Detailed_Findings_Deck_Final.pdf)

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/personalfinance/2017/09/11/how-to-keep-your-documents-safe-from-a-natural-disaster/105386248/>

<http://www.newsmax.com/Finance/Personal-Finance/disaster-insurance-home-inventory/2017/09/07/id/812274/>

<https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/whatsnew/around/2015/boathurricane1.html>

<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/my-tree-fell-neighbors-garage-who-pays.html>

<http://money.cnn.com/2017/09/07/pf/protect-finances-before-a-storm/index.html>

<https://www.enservio.com/products-services/select-for-specialty-valuation>