

Financial Planner Joe Hearn Shares Tips for 'National Preparedness Month'

National Preparedness Month is coming up in September. According to the Department of Homeland Security, the effort is intended to "encourage Americans to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses and schools." How do consumers disaster-proof their financial lives? Joe Hearn, a financial advisor and co-author of "If Something Happens to Me," offers seven tips for preparing for a disaster.

Omaha, NE (PRWEB) August 23, 2006 -- National Preparedness Month is coming up in September. According to the Department of Homeland Security, the effort is intended to "encourage Americans to prepare for emergencies in their homes, businesses and schools."

How do consumers disaster-proof their financial lives?

Joe Hearn, a financial planner and co-author of "If Something Happens to Me," (<http://www.ifsomethinghappenstome.com>), offers seven tips for preparing for a disaster, such as a hurricane:

1. Prepare a Grab-and-Go Case. Organize your important legal, financial and insurance paperwork into a file that you can snatch if you need to flee your house or your city. Consider including birth certificates, estate planning documents, financial statements, insurance policies (homeowner's, auto, life, and health), Social Security cards, a list of your prescriptions, a copy of your driver's license and some emergency cash.
2. Make a Contact List. If a disaster occurs, you'll want to contact friends or relatives to let them know you are safe, or ask for help. List names, addresses and phone numbers. Include your trusted advisers, such as your physician, attorney, financial adviser, accountant, insurance agent and banker -- they're all trained to help you pick up the pieces of your life.
3. Prepare a Household Inventory. After a major disaster, most homeowners are simply not able to remember all their belongings for an insurance claim. A household inventory -- a written list, photographs or a video walk-through of your home—will help avoid this problem. Remember to store the inventory somewhere other than your home, with a copy in your grab-and-go case.
4. Meet With Your Advisers. When you have six feet of water in your living room is not the time to discover you don't have flood insurance. The emergency room is not the place to learn you need a medical power of attorney. Take the time to schedule meetings with each of your advisers and let them know you are trying to fill in the gaps and disaster-proof your affairs.
5. Update Your Plans. Change is the one constant in life. Make sure to review and update your affairs at least annually. Some questions to ask include: (1) Has your marital status changed? (2) Has the value of your assets changed significantly? (3) Have you altered your insurance policies? (4) Have you changed jobs? (5) Has your health recently changed? If you answer yes to any of those questions, you need to update your plans.
6. Have a Backup. Let's face it. You may not be able to escape with your important paperwork. Many fires, for example, happen while the homeowners are away. For protection, save backup copies of important documents in safe-deposit box or store them with a trusted friend, relative or adviser. As a general rule, don't keep anything in a safe-deposit box that may be needed in an emergency, such as powers of attorney—a safe-deposit box may not be accessible 24 hours a day and may be sealed temporarily after the box owner dies.

7. Evaluate Storage Solutions Carefully. Your primary focus should be on keeping your information secure. If your computer is your main storage vault, make sure it has up-to-date firewall and anti-virus protection. Use of a reputable online storage service may be a good option for those comfortable with the technology. Keep in mind that in an emergency, portability becomes an additional concern. It would be difficult to grab your computer, with all its plugs and cables, and quickly escape your home. Instead, if you want an electronic copy of your documents, consider scanning them and burning them to a CD or storing them on an external hard drive or a USB flash drive, portable devices that hold a lot of data. For photos, consider one of the many online storage sites.

Fireproof safes may provide added protection for documents. However, you should know that many consumer safes are rated to withstand heat and flames for only about an hour. After that, even if the safe is intact, the internal temperature could rise above 350 degrees and any paper inside would incinerate. None of us can prevent the unexpected, but putting your life back together again is much easier if you have all the pieces.

Members of the media: If you're interested in receiving a review copy of "If Something Happens to Me," visit <http://www.provisiopublishing.com/contact.aspx> to contact Joe Hearn. Hearn welcomes questions and interviews.

Hearn is Vice President of Teckmeyer Financial Services, LLC in Omaha, Nebraska and co-founder of Provisio Publishing, LLC. He has been featured in Dow Jones MarketWatch.com, MSN Money, AARP Bulletin, ePregnancy Magazine, and Bottom Line/Personal, as well as broadcast outlets, such as Dr. Laura Schlesinger's National Radio Program.

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