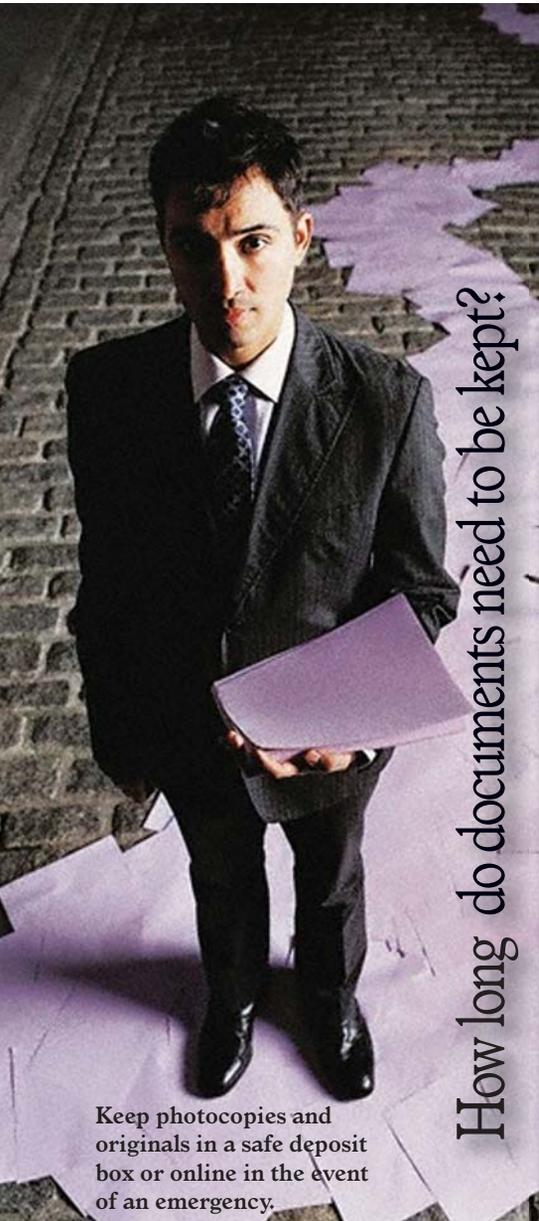


How long is your paper trail?



How long do documents need to be kept?

Keep photocopies and originals in a safe deposit box or online in the event of an emergency.

Going Paperless.

It's an increasing trend for banks, utility companies and even some retailers.

In an effort to save natural resources, many paperless transactions are great ideas.

Certain paper documents are crucial to retain. You should always keep copies of the following:

- Family birth certificates
- Social Security cards
- Living wills
- Power of attorney documents
- Insurance policies
- Real estate titles and deeds
- Retirement plans
- Investment trade confirmations
- Military documents and veteran benefits

Some documents only need to be kept for a definitive amount of time.

Tax returns and supporting documents and receipts should be kept for the previous seven filing years.

Original receipts for items still under warranty should be set aside at least until the warranty expires.

Pay stubs are only needed until the end of the year to confirm the year-end totals on your W2 form.

Store your paperwork.

You should have a filing cabinet large enough to keep most of your important documents in a central location. For future convenience, create separate files for different types of paperwork. This is a great place to store your automobile pink slips, which should never be kept inside your car. These filing cabinets should ideally have at least one drawer that can be locked for sensitive documents.

Protect your essential documents.

In many instances, it is prudent to purchase a fireproof safe, usually priced around \$40, to protect extremely important and one-of-a-kind documents. These safes are fireproof, waterproof and have key locks. Heavier duty wall and floor safes can also be considered to protect valuables.

Destroy certain documents.

Bank notices and ATM transaction receipts typically do not need to be kept and often contain personal information that could be used by identity thieves. Pre-approved credit card offers should immediately be destroyed. Credit card statements and other bills can be destroyed once you have confirmation your payment was received and properly recorded. Paper shredders are inexpensive ways to destroy sensitive materials, but make sure that shredded documents are too small to be reconstructed. Using a cross cut paper shredder will ensure that your documents are properly destroyed.

The benefits of professional shredding:

- **Destroyed documents are completely unrecoverable by others.**
- **“Certificates of Destruction” can limit your liability.**
- **It is more cost-effective than a heavy-duty paper shredder.**
- **Witnessing documents being destroyed prevents security risks.**



Keep Your Sensitive Documents **S A F E**

There are several ways to keep your important paperwork safe from prying eyes and unexpected disasters.

Rent a safe deposit box.

Rent a safe deposit box at a bank to store original copies of your paperwork and retain photocopies of the documents for your secure filing cabinet at home. Keep your key somewhere it won't be misplaced and give a copy to your accountant or lawyer.

Consider asking a trusted friend or relative to co-sign the box account with you so it can still be accessed in the event of an emergency. If possible, choose a box near the top of the wall to minimize the risk of flood damage.

Entrust your documents to others.

Send copies to friends or relatives that live out of state to ensure that your documents remain safe in the instance of a widespread disaster. You could also give the original paperwork to your lawyer. By law, lawyers are required to store any sensitive material you provide them in a safe location.

If you decide to rent a safe deposit box, notify a friend, relative or lawyer of the location and contents of the box. Let them know where they can get access to a key or how to contact a co-signer.

Store your documents in a home safe.

The most convenient way to protect your documents is to purchase a home safe. There are several types of home safes, from clandestine wall safes to large floor safes. The most important things to consider when selecting a safe are that it is waterproof, fireproof and unable to be pried open.

As with a safe deposit box, notify at least one friend, family member or trusted adviser of its contents and combination or key location. Do not keep your combination written down in your home.



Checklist of Documents to Keep in a Locked Fireproof Box:

- Birth certificates, Social Security cards
- Passports
- List of bank accounts and contact information
- List of insurance policies
- Copy of durable power of attorney and living will
- List of investment and retirement accounts
- Copy of each will of which you are an executor
- List of doctors and contact information
- List of medications and prescription numbers

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

- **Purchase computer software** that can help organize your documents electronically. Scan copies of your important paperwork onto your computer, and lock your computer with a password when it is not in use. Digital copies of your paperwork will allow you to burn images of your vital documents onto a CD for easy portability and access.
- **Protect your paperwork from the elements.** If you don't have your documents in a waterproof safe, you should still consider putting birth certificates and Social Security cards in plastic covers to protect them from water damage.
- **Keep a small notebook** with all of your home inventory information. You may need to supply your insurance company with proof of ownership in case of theft or a natural disaster. Retaining copies of receipts and taking photographs of these items are the most important steps, but writing down serial numbers in a notebook will also help you reclaim your property.