

Documentation of Valuables

When trying to pick up the pieces after a calamity, you'll be asked by your insurance company to provide an inventory of lost or damaged items. Recalling the exact contents of your home under any condition would be challenging, but perhaps more so under the stress of a fire or theft. However, creating an inventory before disaster strikes can make it much easier to make a claim.

It's wise to generate a detailed list of your possessions. Making a video or photographic record of your possessions is advisable, as well. You may want to consider storing your inventory in a safe-deposit box off your property, or at least in a lockable fireproof storage box in your home. Some people even store their inventory list at work. Not only will a record of your possessions take most of the guesswork out of filing a claim, police say such documentation can help you prove ownership in case your belongings are recovered from a thief. Also, you may want to video or photograph the mess after a disaster and before you begin the clean up. This can help you prove the extent of damage without having to wait to get your life back in order.

Remember to list items not in your house, because they may be covered against loss as well. For example, the contents of your tool shed or personal property that might be in storage or with a child at college. A good rule of thumb is to list anything you would take with you if you moved - everything but the floor, walls and ceiling. This includes certain appliances, window coverings, rugs and pictures. Clothing should be listed, too. If you don't want to catalog every T-shirt and pair of socks, make a list that gives a numerical breakdown of your wardrobe (i.e., 5 pairs of blue jeans, 3 pairs of athletic shoes).

The list should include a description, quantity, and purchase price or estimated value. Describe size, color, brand name, and any other relative information. Receipts, bills, and other documents should be provided when possible to help justify your figures. Purchase price and date of purchase will also help when determining the value of each object. Where applicable, list serial numbers.

It is also important to update your list regularly. Revise it periodically to include newly acquired items. Updating it about every six months or whenever you move should be often enough.

Some other tips:

Organize your list by rooms. Go through each room and list everything in it from the contents of drawers to the ceiling fan.

Engrave your name or identifying mark--initials or numbers, or a combination of both, on everything you can. This can help police find you if an item is recovered.

If you are documenting with video, describe each item as it is shown on camera.