



Emergency preparedness: Your credit and financial checklist



Credit and financial preparedness for emergencies

Emergencies can strike at any time, and the financial fallout can be devastating. Once you've made plans for the physical safety and immediate needs of you and your loved ones during an emergency, take these proactive steps to help make the financial recovery process less overwhelming.



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EMERGENCY



Natural disasters

Hurricanes, earthquakes,
floods, wildfires



National emergencies

Violent acts or threats,
government shutdowns



Global pandemics and widespread health crises

Widespread infectious diseases,
airborne illnesses



Before an emergency... Preparation is key

Build an emergency fund

Try to save 3-6 months' worth of living expenses in a readily accessible account. This cushion can help cover unexpected costs and income loss. Consider a budget to help you track spending and identify areas where you can cut back, freeing up funds for emergencies. Having a pre-approved line of credit can also provide financial flexibility during emergencies.



Organize important documents

Be sure to keep essential documents like ID cards, insurance policies, credit card information, and banking information in a secure, accessible location. You'll want to include a physical list of phone numbers and contact information for family, friends, organizations and financial institutions in case mobile phone use is disrupted.

Making copies of these documents is a good idea. Store your physical copies in a secure waterproof/fireproof location like a safe deposit box or home safe. Digital copies can be stored on encrypted flash drives or in cloud storage.





If you need to rely on credit during an emergency, tracking your credit scores and protecting your identity is an important way to prepare. Download the **myEquifax** app for easy access to this information on your mobile device.



Review your insurance policies and wills

Understand your coverage for homeowners/renters, health, and other relevant policies. Ensure they're up-to-date and you know the claims process. Create or update your will and other estate planning documents to ensure your properties and assets are distributed according to your wishes.



Know your credit standing

Managing your credit well before an emergency provides more flexibility if you need to rely on it during a crisis. Regularly pull your free credit reports from all three nationwide credit reporting agencies for free at [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com). Review your reports for any unfamiliar accounts, incorrect personal information, or errors — and dispute any inaccuracies immediately.



During an emergency...

Focus on communication

Prioritize essential expenses

Focus on buying necessities like food, water, shelter, and medical care. Avoid unnecessary spending and impulse purchases by sticking to your emergency fund budget.

Document everything

If you need to evacuate, try to take your important documents with you and keep record of all expenses, damage, and communication with insurance companies and lenders.

Communicate with lenders and providers

If you anticipate difficulty making payments, contact your lenders and providers (banks, mortgage lenders, credit card companies, utilities companies) immediately. Be sure to let them know about any lost or stolen credit, debit, or ATM cards. Explain your financial situation and explore options. Some may offer hardship programs like forbearance, payment deferral or modified payments during emergencies.





Forward your mail (if displaced)

If your residence is uninhabitable, consider forwarding your mail to a secure temporary address or arranging to hold it at the post office. Replacement documents often come by mail.



Beware of scams and protect against identity theft

Be cautious of individuals or organizations offering quick financial relief or repairs. Do not share your Social Security number, bank account details or other sensitive information unless you are absolutely sure of the person's legitimacy — especially anyone claiming to be from a government agency, charity, or service provider. If you believe you are a victim of identity theft, file a police report. This can be crucial for disputing fraudulent accounts and proving your case to creditors.



Place a security freeze

If you suspect identity theft, place an initial fraud alert on your credit reports. This encourages creditors to take extra steps to verify your identity before opening new accounts or making changes to existing ones. For stronger protection, consider placing a security freeze on your credit reports. This restricts access to your credit reports for the purpose of opening new credit. It makes it much harder for identity thieves to open accounts in your name.



After an emergency...

Recover with confidence

Assess financial damage

Evaluate the full extent of your financial losses and refer to your documentation so you can submit insurance claims promptly and provide all necessary information.

Replace lost or destroyed documents

Prioritize replacing critical identification documents (driver's license, Social Security card, birth certificates, passports) and financial documents by contacting the issuing agencies or relevant government offices for replacement procedures.





Seek financial assistance

Explore government aid programs, non-profit organizations, and community resources that offer financial assistance or support. If you are facing significant financial challenges, consider consulting with a financial advisor, credit counselor, or legal professional.

Monitor your statements and credit reports

Carefully review all bank, credit card, and other financial statements for unauthorized transactions. Obtain new copies of your credit reports from all three nationwide credit reporting agencies. Look for any suspicious activity, accounts you didn't open, or unauthorized inquiries. Identity thieves often exploit chaos following disasters.

Rebuild your budget

Adjust your budget to reflect your new financial situation and prioritize rebuilding your emergency fund.

Equifax is committed to helping people live their financial best.

You can find additional resources at [equifax.com/learn](https://www.equifax.com/learn)



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