

YOUR VITAL DOCUMENTS

Keeping Track of Your Will

Without a will, you or your loved ones might have to spend months—and many dollars in legal fees—locating bank accounts, safe deposit boxes and other particulars of the financial life of a deceased relative.

If you are a parent, do your children know where your will is? Do you know where your parents' wills or their bank accounts are? How about their attorney's name and phone number? Every family needs to prepare a document which provides a detailed list of everything a survivor needs to know but is too polite to ask.

This document should be updated semi-annually. At least one copy should be kept at home, another in your safe-deposit box and, if children are under twelve, a third in the hands of their potential guardian. The following information should be included.

Keeping Track of Your Personal Papers

State the location of your will, recent income tax returns, Social Security cards, marriage certificate, military discharge papers, passports, business partnership agreements, house deed, mortgage, leases and car titles.

Keeping Track of Your Advisors

List the names, addresses and telephone numbers of your accountant or tax preparer, insurance agents, stockbroker, attorney, financial planner, bank trust officer, employer and employee-benefits counselor, executor, potential guardian for your children and any other key financial players in your life.

Keeping Track of Your Debts

Write down the names of your credit-card issuers, their addresses, phone numbers and your card number. Also, furnish information on your mortgage, auto and personal loans, including the phone numbers and addresses of lenders, the loan numbers, terms and approximate balances.

Keeping Track of Your Insurance

Specify the amount, company names and addresses, policy numbers, beneficiaries and location of policies for all coverage. Don't forget to include the same information for your group plans.

Keeping Track of Your Savings and Investment Records

List the names and addresses of all the financial institutions where you have savings or investment accounts. For each account, specify the name or names on it, the number, the type, the date it was opened, and the approximate balance. Also, put down the location of account statements and passbooks, as well as stock, bond, mutual fund or other investment documents.

Keeping Track of Your Safe-Deposit Box

Note where it is, who has access, where the keys are, and in whose name the box is registered. Also provide a complete inventory of its contents. In your safe deposit box should be all of your original paperwork for the following documents:

- Certificates for your stocks, bonds and all other investments
- Passports and any military or veteran papers
- All trust and contract agreements
- A copy of your living wills (Generally, the original should be with your attorney, since safe deposit boxes can be sealed temporarily after a death.)
- Power of attorney papers
- Insurance policies
- List of household inventory & videos
- Marriage license
- Appraisals of valuables
- Deeds to property
- Titles to autos, RVs and boats
- Household improvement papers
- Tax records

- Naturalization records if applicable
- Cash for one month's living expenses
- Traveler's checks