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What do you do if disaster strikes?



The weather can be unpredictable. In Pennsylvania, we've seen flooding, tornados, earthquakes and other natural disasters. So, what do you do when disaster strikes?

First and foremost, be prepared. Think about it for a minute. What would you take with you if you had to unexpectedly leave your home in a hurry? Of course, the kids and pets are most important, and there may be some sentimental items like photos, family heirlooms, etc. But more important than material things, you're going to want to have your financial information organized and easy to grab in an instant. Hopefully, you have insured your personal belongings properly, and all those things can be replaced.

RECORDS TO SAFEGUARD

So what types of financial records and personal documents are going to help you recover more quickly and easily if you get displaced from your home? As far as personal documents are concerned, having things like your driver's license, passports, social security cards, birth certificates, marriage or divorce documents, house titles and deeds, and any car, boat, and RV registrations and titles will make life a lot easier post-disaster. Financial records like insurance policies, investment records, income and other tax information, paystubs and employer benefit records (if not available digitally), and wills and medical powers of attorney will come in handy to help make life a little easier after a disaster, too.

You should consider having a fire-proof safe or box to keep all your important paper documents in, which will also keep everything in one spot to grab quickly. You may also want to make copies of these documents and keep them at another location like a family member's house or a safe deposit box. Another option, if you have access to a computer, would be to scan your paper documents and transfer them and any other important information you may have on the computer to a thumbdrive for easy access and storage.

DOCUMENT YOUR BELONGINGS

Another important thing to do is to make a written inventory of your belongings along with taking a video of each room. Doing this will make it easier when making a claim to your insurance and will help prove what items have been lost or damaged.

If you and your home do fall victim to a disaster, first thing you need to do is contact your homeowner's insurance to start the claims process. Your insurance agent will be able to guide you through this process. You also need to contact your creditors, such as your credit cards, mortgage lender, etc. to let them know what happened. They may have ways to help. If you're displaced from your home, contact your utility companies to see if you're able to shut off services until you're able to return to your home. This could save you some money you may need for other things.

Unfortunately, you'll need to watch out for scams offering to help, too. If you're approached by contractors offering services door-to-door, insurance agents trying to sell after-the-fact policies, organizations or charities with names similar to government agencies, or any organization charging up-front fees to help with claim services, benefits or loans, it's most likely a scam. Government agencies or charities do NOT charge fees.

DISASTER RESOURCES

[Commonwealth of Pennsylvania](#)

[PA Department of Community & Economic Development](#)

[U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development](#)

[FEMA](#)

[PA 211](#)

[PHFA](#)

Financial Counseling

For Pennsylvania renters hoping to make the jump into homeownership, PHFA is excited to announce new federal funding to our state so that you can receive free, local counseling about the homebuying process, helping to make your home purchase easier to understand and less intimidating.

In mid-June, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded \$10 million in grant funding nationally, with \$479,204 being awarded to Pennsylvania, to support activities that prepare and help prospective homebuyers purchase homes.

PHFA and its HUD-approved housing counseling agencies received its share of grant funding to help renters prepare to become homeowners thru counseling.

The goal being to increase homeownership among historically under-served communities, to reduce the racial wealth gap, and to address homebuying barriers that impact marginalized communities.

Renters interested in becoming homeowners can take advantage of this free financial counseling by visiting [PHFA's website](#) and choosing the type of counseling you're interested in. Then scroll to the bottom of the page and enter your county to find a counseling agency near you. Current homeowners can also utilize counseling to boost your personal financial situation, foreclosure prevention and assistance, mortgage mediation or housing counseling stability. Homeowners can find a counseling agency near you by also visiting [PHFA's website](#). All housing and financial counseling is available free to all Pennsylvania residents.



PHFA's Executive Director & CEO Robin Wiessmann (front row, second from left) and PHFA's Director of Counseling Terri Redmond (front row, third from right) were in attendance, along with other representatives of the state's housing counseling network, for the check presentation.

Learn how to manage your personal finances better. PHFA's "Master Your Money" podcast can help!

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