**Locate Important Documents to Prepare for Severe Weather**

As part of Severe Weather Preparedness Week, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security advises Hoosiers to locate important documents before disaster strikes. Having access to these documents can expedite the recovery process.

According to a 2013 survey of Hoosiers, more than half of Indiana households who responded did not have important and hard-to-replace documents safely stored and had not included copies of them as part of a preparedness kit in the event of a disaster or emergency. It is helpful to have these documents organized and safely stored regardless, and now can be a good time to set a goal of gathering these documents as part of tax preparation.

“Having important financial and other documents organized in a safe place can be very helpful in the event of an emergency,” said IDHS Senior Public Information Officer John Erickson. “We also encourage Hoosiers to have copies of important and hard-to-replace documents in a ‘grab-and-go’ box or folder should it become necessary to quickly evacuate their home. The November tornadoes are an example of the importance of having vital documents stored properly.”

Below is a list of important and often hard-to replace documents to consider making copies of so they can be taken along in the event of an evacuation. Erickson says a binder, expandable file or box is fine, as long as it’s portable and to remember that most of these documents will be copies. He adds to always be sure to store originals in a secure, dry place like a fire safe or lockbox.  Having important information in one place is invaluable, whether or not there is an emergency. IDHS suggests gathering and copying:

* **Vital records**: birth certificates; marriage licenses; passports; adoption records; property and auto records (deeds, titles, leases); insurance policies (auto, home, renter’s, umbrella policies)
* **Document locator**: tells others where originals are stored
* **Financial information**: list of all bank account numbers; copies of the front and back of each credit card; list of all retirement, pension, investment account numbers; mortgage and loan information; payroll and benefit information
* **Medical information**: copies of health, life and disability insurance cards and policies; medical history of each family member; list of medications and prescriptions, including dose and pharmacy; details about any ongoing treatments or conditions
* **Contacts**:  contact information for friends and extended family members; neighbors who have access to your home; physicians and specialists; financial advisors or bankers; employer and benefits administrators; legal advisor