

Flooding, fire, and theft are some of the most common disasters encountered in the home. However creating a plan for prevention, preparation, response, and recovery to these incidents can help minimise losses to your precious possessions.

Step 1: Prevention

Preventing a disaster from happening in the first place is the best approach, and this essentially involves assessing any risks in and around your home and creating a plan to manage these risks.

Some risk factors in and around the home can include:

- Features of the environment (ie. Proximity to bush land, rivers, the ocean, trees, and local weather systems, etc).
- Features of the neighbourhood (ie. Factories, drainage).
- Construction or renovation projects.
- Building structure and plumbing.

If you are new to your home and the neighbourhood, you can check with your neighbours to see what kinds of incidents have occurred in the area in the past. You can also seek advice from your local fire and police departments about potential hazards and security.

Once you have identified what risks are present around your home, you need to create a plan to manage them.

These activities can include:

- Regular housekeeping.
 - Good housekeeping will reduce dust around your home and reduce the potential for any pest infestation.
- Regular maintenance of your property. Some examples of this include:
 - Trimming trees around the house to reduce risks of falling branches damaging your roof or other parts of your home.
 - Regular inspection of your washing machine and dishwasher hoses.
 - Regular cleaning of gutters and drainage pipes to prevent blockages in times of wet weather.

- Regular checks of fire detection systems.
- Improving how your possessions are stored.
 - For instance, boxing items and storing them off the floor helps to reduce damage in the event of an incident such as a flood.
- Keeping an eye out for possible warning signs such as building cracks, etc.
- Installing locks on windows or deadbolts on doors to improve security.
- Turning off your water supply at the main shut off points before you go on holiday.
 - This will help prevent damage caused by any undetected plumbing leaks, etc.
- Taking out a home and contents insurance policy, consulting with an insurance agent to determine exactly what level of cover you need.

Step 2: Preparation

The next step is to create a plan if an event were to occur.

This can include:

- Creating a list of emergency contacts and having that list accessible to all in the home:
 - This list would include first responders such as ambulance, fire department, and police; maintenance persons such as plumbers and electricians; insurance agents; family or friends that can help in the event of an emergency.
- Photographing and cataloguing your possessions for insurance and identification purposes.
- Mapping critical information about your property such as shutting off points for electricity and water.
- Create a list of your significant items and their locations, and include this in any existing fire or flood evacuation plans for your home.

Step 3: Response

In the event of an incident, the best thing to do is to try and keep a clear head.

In some cases, such as in the event of a fire or natural disaster, there may not be anything that you can do until the first responders have declared the area safe to enter.

You should only try and protect your possessions if there is no danger to yourself or anyone else. For instance, in the event of a flood, you need to be mindful of the dangers of electrocution.

DO NOT ENTER A DAMAGED PREMESIS UNTIL IT IS SAFE TO DO SO.

The following are steps that you can undertake if an incident occurs:

- Assess the situation, inform the key people in your emergency contacts lists as required.
- If safe, attempt to determine the source of the issue and stop it (ie. shutting off your water supply in the event of a burst pipe).
- Remove or protect items that haven't been affected by the incident (ie. covering items with plastic in the event of roof leaks).
- Document everything that has occurred, including photographing any damage, identifying high priority items for salvage, and contacting your insurance agency.

Step 4: Recovery

Before salvaging your possessions, stop and assess the situation and plan your next steps.

Some issues that can arise in your recovery operations include:

- Ability to handle items without incurring further damage.

For more information, see *Be Prepared*

<https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/disaster-planning>

- Is the item significant, or is it something that can be easily replaced?
- Do you have enough resources?
- Are there potential health hazards in the environment (ie. asbestos, sewage, and mould)?

Remember that after a disaster, your possessions are generally more fragile.

- Your items may be in pieces, paint layers may be flaking, and adhesive joins may be coming apart.
- Wet paper items can easily tear and waterlogged boxes can collapse when you pick them up.
- Handling items will drive dust and soot into the surface, making it harder to remove.
- Both the type of material your item is constructed from and the type of damage that has occurred will determine the steps taken to recover your possessions.

If possible, advice should be sought from a conservator before undertaking any salvage activity. Information about treatment of your damaged collections should also be obtained from a conservator. Do not presume an item is unsalvageable without consulting with an appropriate conservation specialist.

Note that some water-damaged items can be frozen to 'buy time' if it is not possible to undertake immediate salvage activities. Refer to the '*Freezing to Eradicate Insects*' fact sheet for information on how to pack materials for freezing.

Freeze drying can also be an option for salvaging materials, however please note that this process is not suitable for all materials and consultation should be sought prior to undertaking this process.