

Estate Planning: Document Storage Guide

Overview

Creating your estate planning documents is only the first step. Storing them correctly is equally important to ensure they can be found and used when they are needed. This guide outlines the best practices for physical and digital document storage.

1. Where to Store Original Physical Documents

Home Fireproof Safe

This is often the most accessible option for your Executor or Trustee.

- **Pros:** Immediate access 24/7; protection from fire and minor flooding.
- **Cons:** Can be stolen; if the combination is lost, it can be difficult to open.
- **What to Store:** Original Last Will and Testament, Living Trust, Powers of Attorney, Living Will.
- **Key Action:** Ensure your Executor knows the location of the safe and the combination or key location.

Safe Deposit Box

Warning: Exercise caution with Safe Deposit Boxes.

- **Pros:** Highly secure from theft and disaster.
- **Cons:** In many jurisdictions, banks seal the box upon death. Your Executor may need a court order to open it to get the Will, but they need the Will to get the court order.
- **Best Practice:** Only use this if you have a joint owner (like a spouse) who has right of survivorship and can access it immediately, or if your state allows authorized access for document retrieval.

Attorney's Vault

Many estate planning attorneys offer to store original documents.

- **Pros:** Secure; attorneys have protocols for releasing documents to the correct people.
- **Cons:** The attorney may retire or move; fees may apply.

2. Digital Document Storage

In the modern era, digital copies are essential for ease of reference, though they often do not replace legal originals.

Cloud Storage (Google Drive, Dropbox, iCloud)

- Create a folder specifically for "Estate Documents."
- Scan signed copies of all legal documents into PDF format.
- Share read-only access with your designated agents (Executor, Trustee, Health Care Proxy).

Digital Vault Services

Dedicated services (like Everplans or FidSafe) exist specifically for end-of-life planning. These often have higher security protocols and legacy contact features.

3. Document Access Checklist

Who needs what? Use this table to determine who should hold copies of your documents.

Document	Original Location	Copy to Spouse	Copy to Agents
Last Will & Testament	Fireproof Safe	Yes	Executor
Revocable Living Trust	Fireproof Safe	Yes	Successor Trustee
Financial Power of Attorney	Fireproof Safe	Yes	Agent
Medical Power of Attorney	Fireproof Safe	Yes	Agent & Doctor
Living Will / Advance Directive	Fireproof Safe	Yes	Agent & Hospital
Life Insurance Policies	File Cabinet/Digital	Yes	Beneficiaries

4. What NOT to Hide

Certain documents must be readily available to avoid delays in medical care or funeral arrangements.

- **Medical Directives:** Do not lock these away where no one can find them in an emergency. Provide copies to your primary care physician.
- **Funeral Instructions:** Do not put these inside your Will (which is often read *after* the funeral). Keep a separate "Letter of Instruction" easily accessible.

Note: Periodically review your storage plan (every 3-5 years) to ensure keys work, combinations haven't been forgotten, and digital access permissions are still active.