


Vital Records Protection: KEY ISSUES FOR LAW OFFICES

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Fire can be devastating almost anywhere it occurs. A fire's wrath is evidenced by property damage, environmental destruction, and the loss of irreplaceable documents, photos or heirlooms. And while it is not possible to guarantee that none of this will ever happen to your home or business, it is possible to protect the things that will preserve family history or the rebirth of a business after a disaster destroys almost everything. Some businesses must rely on the best fire protection available not only for the sake of longevity, but to protect the rights of their clients. Law offices fall directly into this wide category.

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– Michael Platts of Charles R. Tutwiler and Associates, an expert liability insurance adjusting firm in Tampa, FL

The U.S. legal system is aimed at finding the unbiased truth and assigning liability based on tangible facts, evidence and, if necessary, a fair trial. Documents, photographic evidence and other forms of proof are essential for arriving at a fair, final decision. Failing to protect these vital items from fire, flood, theft or other disaster can lose a case, send an innocent person to jail or let a guilty one go free. Fireproof containers, then, are an essential piece of equipment for any law office, regardless of the type of law they practice.

Most law offices – practices of all sizes and types - are fully aware of the need for these fireproof containers. A perfect example is the fire protection policies set forth by the office of Walker L. Chandler, Attorney at Law, located in Atlanta, GA. Chandler, a former fireman, has prepared his law office for the worst.

"Being an ex-fireman, I know that disasters are going to happen and I've seen what can happen when you're not prepared. You can't stop them; only plan for them. I've always had fireproof record storage in both my home and my office. Even going a step further, I've strategically located my 4-drawer FireKing filing cabinet outside of the main building so that in an emergency, I'd be able to get to it right away. More people need to think ahead about a fire affecting them and use these containers."

St. Petersburg, FL, law firm, Sharbaugh and Associates made a proactive decision to purchase a 4-drawer FireKing fireproof filing cabinet after hearing a few horror stories about fire destruction.

"Close to one year ago we bought our first FireKing filing cabinet. Until then, all of our files were at risk of destruction. Important documents such as wills, evidence, photos and other items are now safe from disaster. We've heard about other

offices, not just law offices, losing everything in a fire. We didn't want to be so unfortunate and now we won't be – everything important is protected,” partner Joanne Sharbaugh proudly explained.

Active client records and documents are not the only type of record that law offices want to protect. Other internal items such as accounting information, checks, back-up data disks, lease agreements and other important files need to be protected from disaster as well. Nancy Hudson, office manager at the law offices of Barry J. Baker in Charleston, South Carolina explains:

“All of our important files are kept under the protection of fireproof lock and key. Not just our active client files, but also tons of other things that we need to protect as well. We have two 4-drawer FireKing filing cabinets to safeguard everything important. It would be a major headache trying to replace everything in those cabinets. We are very grateful to have the added piece of mind that our FireKing cabinets give us on a daily basis.”

Knowing that important files are safe from destruction offers more than just peace of mind. Law offices are seeking the best liability protection available; they are in a very litigious business and want to do whatever possible not to be sued themselves. Losing client information or sequestered evidence to a fire would not only be disaster for that client, it could in turn mean that the client now can take legal action against the firm that was representing them in the first place.

Charles R. Tutwiler and Associates, an expert liability insurance adjusting firm in Tampa, FL, deals with many businesses that have lost everything to fire. Executive Michael Platts tells about the placement of liability after a fire in an attorney's office:

“Liability can occur in two ways – if a person or group does something to cause a loss or problem to someone else, or if a person or group fails to take reasonable action to ensure that a loss or problem will not occur. It is fair to assume that if a law firm does not take action to protect client's files, then they are liable for that loss.”

Regardless of the motive for purchasing fireproof record storage, all law offices should plan ahead and protect the vital information used both internally and for the benefit of their clients. It takes very little time and money to properly store sensitive material, especially given the consequences of losing everything to fire, flood or theft.