

By Tara Puckey

Keeping specific information, essentially your “life” on paper, close at hand will make moving and deployments much easier. Here’s a list of some of the most important:

### Medical and Dental Records

These records are incredibly helpful when changing physicians or for emergency room visits in an unfamiliar place. You’ll also likely need immunization records to enroll children in school or daycare. A list of medications is a good idea to keep around also, as well as a list of names and phone numbers of previous physicians. Keep in mind that some physician’s offices will even digitally reproduce records for you or help arrange a transfer of records to another medical office. Don’t forget the medical records for your furry family members as well.

### Birth Certificates and Social Security Cards

You’ll likely need birth certificates or Social Security cards for just about any important paperwork, military or otherwise. It’s always a good idea to have them on hand for everyone in the family. Be careful about carrying these everywhere because getting replacements can be time consuming and inconvenient. Instead, some states and counties offer smaller, laminated birth certificates about the size of a credit card that are easier to hang onto, allowing you to keep the original in a safe, permanent location.

### LES Statements

When purchasing a home or a car, you’ll be asked to provide documents to prove employment history and income, so it’s a good idea to keep at

least the last three LES statements. In addition, apartment rentals can also require copies of such documentation. Don’t forget that an LES can provide useful information as well — ETS date, leave information and BAH rate.

### Marriage Certificate or Divorce Decree

In order to fix any mix-ups with DEERS, it’s nice to have a marriage certificate or divorce decree on hand. It might be necessary to clear up BAH rates or medical benefits. Like birth certificates and Social Security cards, replacements are sometimes a hassle so make sure this is only carried for short, necessary periods of time. Later, return it to your safe deposit box or fire safe.

### Orders

It’s essential that you keep orders nearby. They not only hold necessary information about the when and where, but also are required in many instances. Keep several copies on hand so they can be left with the appropriate people and consider making a digital copy so that it’s easier to produce more when necessary.

### Moving and Real Estate Paperwork

During a move, it’s vital to keep important paperwork close at hand. Hang onto contact information for the moving company and the transportation office representative. Also, be sure you have copies of your Bill of Lading, which lists all household goods being delivered. You hope to not need this information, but it can certainly be invaluable if you do.

Keep all your real estate paperwork if you recently sold or purchased a home: a HUD statement, Truth in

Lending, Note and Deed. You’ll need the information to file income taxes. Closing papers can help you prove capital gains and losses as well.

### Insurance Information

Hang onto paperwork for all of your insurance policies, including property and auto. You’ll likely need updated auto insurance cards at the gate of most military installations as well as if you are stopped by police or get into an accident. Homeowner’s insurance information can be used to update the policy after a move or to address losses of personal property if you have such coverage. Don’t forget to list phone numbers of agents for quick reference and double-check that your premiums are paid up.

### Passports

Even if you’re not traveling out of the country, another form of picture ID is always helpful. However, obtaining replacement passports can be a long, costly process, so be careful where you stash them.

### Power of Attorney

A Power of Attorney must be notarized, so carrying the document with the original seal or signature is important. It’s always a good idea to have more than one copy notarized. Also, have regular copies available to leave with lenders or financial institutions if necessary. Remember, you may need additional supporting documents with a Power of Attorney, especially copies of orders.

### Tax Returns

The previous years tax return is helpful for several reasons, although not always common ones. First of all, you can quickly access all your financial information and have it readily available for financial institutions. Also, paperwork for educational benefits, like the FAFSA, often requires information about your previous year’s annual gross income. Your return is also helpful for budgeting, especially if you are relocating with a new pay scale. ●

*If you're not good with folders and stacks of papers, there are other solutions. Some of the items that aren't used frequently can be burned onto a disk. It's a good idea to make two and keep the second in a safe location, such as a safe deposit box or with a close relative. You can also transfer the files to a USB drive, which is smaller and easier to carry. However, keep in mind that you may not always be able to jack a USB drive into all computers.*