

Give Your Records an Annual Check Up

Now that 2009 has arrived, everyone should take some time to dust off their legal documents and give them a thorough review. Go through each document and make sure that there has not been a major life change that needs to be addressed. Examples of such important changes include deaths, births, divorces, marriages, illness, disability, etc... If there has been a change, you may need to update your legal documents to reflect that new reality. These documents would include your last will and testament, revocable living trust, durable power of attorney, designation of health care surrogate, living will and pre-need guardian declaration.

You should also review your finances as well. Tax time is a good time to examine your financial records and determine if your financial goals are being met. Maybe it is time to see your broker/agent and discuss your investments during these trying times. Do your insurance policies (health, life, disability, long term care, home owners, auto, etc...) meet your current needs?

Also, many of us will be visiting our accountant this time of year. Be sure to not only review your tax liability for 2008 but also ask how you may reduce your tax liabilities in 2009. There have been some recent tax changes that may work to your advantage as well. Be sure to ask your accountant about these.

The beginning of the year is a good time to review your health care plan for the upcoming year. I suggest that you may want to also have a family meeting to discuss what the plan would be if there were a catastrophic illness such as dementia, stroke, or heart attack. This is especially important if you are in a second marriage with children from a prior marriage. Ninety percent of the litigation I do involves a later in life marriage and children from a previous marriage.

Lastly, when you have completed all these things, put it all in writing. That way if something befalls you, your loved ones can find all your legal, financial and health information. This saves valuable time, makes their job as caregiver, health care advocate, or attorney-in-fact that much easier. Having everything written down also ensures that your wishes are honored. Think of it as a road map. It is much easier to drive the car with one!