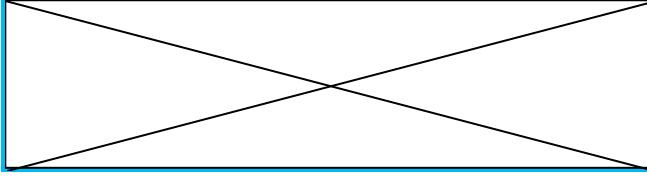


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THE SHINY SHEET



By GAIL LIBERMAN Palm Beach, FL. Saturday, June 2, 2012

Bank safe deposit box security is getting shoddier especially at Florida megabank branches, a bank safe deposit box consultant warns.

So you might want to investigate how your bank handles safe deposit box security before relying on it to store your precious valuables.

David P. McGuinn, president of Safe Deposit Box Specialists in Houston, also says that weather cycles are producing more hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and fires. This puts safe deposit boxes at greater risk. Don't assume your bank safe deposit box is either waterproof or fireproof — nor is it protected by FDIC insurance.

Known cases involving missing bank safe deposit box contents tallied at least \$15 million in 2011 alone, McGuinn says. Recent cases have involved missing precious metals, coin collections and jewelry. Often, he notes, such cases don't go to trial because banks seek to avoid adverse publicity.

In the mid-1990s, an amendment to the federal Bank Protection Act relaxed certain requirements for bank safe deposit boxes. At least one large North Carolina-based bank, aggressively expanding its branch network into Florida, took advantage of this change, McGuinn says. It began omitting important features such as private, secure vaults for safe-deposit boxes. Other large banks expanding branch networks into Florida followed suit.

Florida banks have led the nation in installing newer-style self-service safe deposit boxes, according to McGuinn, rather than a more secure "dual key" system. With a dual key system, both a bank employee and the box renter have keys required to open the safe deposit box. Newer automated systems, by contrast, often are lodged out in the open and may provide electronic access during extended hours with no bank employee to oversee the transaction.

Before renting a safe deposit box, McGuinn suggests you check for the following:

- Does your bank branch have sprinklers in case of fire? In recent Oregon and Iowa bank fires, he notes, there weren't any sprinklers, making the fire more difficult to control. (Safe deposit box damage often comes from heat, smoke and water being used to put out a fire).
- Does your bank prohibit box renters from staying in the vault alone? It should.
- Are your keys removed from the door while you're accessing your box?
- Are privacy rooms available outside of the vault for you to view box contents?
- Are signatures and identification required and verified for any vault access?
- How are safe deposit box keys controlled?
- Are all visitors required to sign an access form?
- Are bank employees prohibited from helping you remove, find or place items in the box?
- Is the vault day gate closed and locked between transactions?
- Are non-renters, such as the cleaning crew or locksmiths, documented and accompanied by safe deposit personnel?
- Is there a closed-circuit security camera to monitor safe deposit box access?
- Do bank employees inspect the room after renters leave?
- Are bank employees readily able to answer all your questions?

Make sure your homeowner insurance covers your safe deposit box, and always put important perishable documents and items, such as stamp collections, in Ziploc bags.