



Vermont Office of the Secretary of State
Safe At Home
Address Confidentiality Program



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PARTICIPANT GUIDE

This guide will help you understand Safe At Home procedures and guidelines. It explains the contents of your enrollment packet and provides information on how to use the Safe At Home Program successfully.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The program gives you a **substitute address** with a **mail forwarding service**. This allows you to receive mail without the sender knowing your actual location.

The program also provides you with a **protected records service** which allows you to use the substitute address when creating records with state and local government agencies. This prevents anyone from tracking you through public records.

WHAT IS IN YOUR ENROLLMENT PACKET

AUTHORIZATION CARD

Your authorization card is very important and is your proof of enrollment. It contains your name, authorization code, expiration date, and substitute address **exactly** as it should appear on all mail. Your authorization code is listed just after the PO Box number. We have found that some businesses either will not or cannot include the authorization code in their systems. If necessary, you can try to list your authorization code as an apartment number. It is extremely important that your authorization code be used in the address. There are over 100 participants in the program who share one post office box. The mail is sorted by the authorization code. If the code is not listed, it could delay or deter the mail from reaching you.

As stated on your card, state and local government agencies are required by law to accept your *Safe At Home* substitute address when creating public documents. You are encouraged to request the use of the substitute address for **any** record that is updated or created within state or local government. It is your responsibility to initiate the request. You may be required to show your authorization card and it may be copied for their files. Agencies are not required to retroactively change your address in their files. If an agency has a question about the program, they may call the Safe At Home

Coordinator, whose number is on the back of the card, for clarification on the program or to confirm participation.

Keep in mind that federal agencies and private businesses do not have to accept the *Safe At Home* substitute address; although we recommend that you ask them to use it.

To enhance the safety of you and your family, you should limit the number of people who know where you live.

Your card is good for 4 years at which time you may renew your participation in the program by filling out recertification forms. There is no limit as to how long you may remain in the program.

CHANGE OF STATUS FORM

This form is to be used for any name, address, or telephone changes. It is also used to add or remove co-applicants.

NAME: If you have a name change, you must notify the program if you want to receive mail in your new name. If you would like a new card with your new name, return your old card with the form and a new one will be issued. You can still also receive mail addressed to any prior names which have been listed on your application. Mail will not be delivered to any name which is not on file with the program. Any mail to a name not listed will be returned to sender.

ADDRESS: The law requires you to notify the Safe At Home Program within seven (7) days of a change in address. **Failure to do so may result in cancellation from the program.** If you move out of state you will be cancelled from the program. Check the Safe At Home website to see if the state you are moving to has an address confidentiality program.

(http://www.sec.state.vt.us/otherprg/safeathome/otherstates_sah.html)

TELEPHONE: You must also keep the program updated on your telephone number so we can contact you if necessary.

CO-APPLICANTS: Any members of your household who will be receiving mail must be listed on your application or added with this form. Mail will only be sent to co-applicants on file with the program. Any mail to individuals not listed will be returned to sender. If you add a person who is 18 years or older, you will need to request a "Checklist of Co-Applicant Responsibilities" form to go with it.

REQUEST FOR WITHDRAWAL FORM

This form is to be completed if you no longer want to participate in the program or if you move out of state. You can select the option to receive any mail that does come through for two months or you can end on a specific date after which all mail will be returned to sender.

MOTOR VEHICLE TRANSACTIONS, MARRIAGE LICENSES, BIRTH CERTIFICATES

MOTOR VEHICLE TRANSACTIONS

Your substitute address will be accepted for mailing and residence (legal) address for all transactions and records (registration, title, driver's license) **except** Commercial Drivers Licenses. You will need to present your Safe At Home Authorization Card along with another legal form of identification.

MARRIAGE LICENSES

If you get married while participating in the Safe At Home Program, you should tell the Town Clerk that you are a participant in the program, show him/her your authorization card and notify him/her that your actual address should not appear on the certificate. The town Clerk will file the certificate with the Supervisor of Vital Records without the address. The Town Clerk will not retain a copy. Upon expiration, withdrawal or cancellation from the program, the Supervisor of Vital Records enters the actual address, which is supplied by the Safe At Home Program Coordinator, and sends the certificate to the Town Clerk.

BIRTH CERTIFICATES

If you have a baby while participating in the Safe At Home Program, you should tell the physician, midwife or hospital **not later than 24 hours after birth** that you are a participant in the program, show him/her your authorization card and notify him/her that the actual address should not appear on the certificate. The certificate is filed with the Supervisor of Vital Records, not the Town Clerk, within 10 days, without the address on it. Upon expiration, withdrawal or cancellation from the program, the Supervisor of Vital Records enters the actual address, which is supplied by the Safe At Home Program Coordinator, and sends the certificate to the Town Clerk.

MAIL PROCEDURES

FIRST CLASS MAIL

All participants (over 100) have the same PO Box, but have an identifying **authorization code**. **Make sure senders include your authorization code**. See your authorization card for the format of your address. **Only first class mail and service of process is forwarded, at no cost to you, to your actual address or a mailing address provided by you on your application.** Junk mail, catalogues, and magazines are not forwarded. Packages are not forwarded and are returned to sender. These items should be directed to a friend, relative or any other preferred address.

Your mail may be delayed 2 to 5 days. Generally, mail is collected daily on weekdays and forwarded to participants within a day.

SERVICE OF PROCESS

The Secretary of State serves as your agent of service of process. This includes legal documents such as subpoenas, jury duty requests, etc. You cannot avoid any legal responsibilities simply by refusing to accept mail forwarded to you by Safe At Home. Although the Office of the Secretary of State signs for this mail, you are still responsible

for any action that may be required. It is important that the program always has your most current residential address and telephone number(s) so we can contact you.

CERTIFIED MAIL

Any certified mail received is signed for on your behalf and forwarded to you.

RETURNED MAIL

Any mail returned to the program as undeliverable would be cause for immediate cancellation from the program. The coordinator will try to reach you by phone and mail before cancelling your participation.

Refusal to accept any mail forwarded to you may result in your cancellation from the program.

VOTING

You may vote as a “Blind Ballot” absentee voter. It is a unique method of voting that allows you to vote in the town in which you reside, without having public voter lists reflect your name or address. Only the Blind Ballot number, which the Safe At Home Office will assign you, appears on the public lists. This means that individuals will not be able to locate you through your town’s public voter list and still maintains your constitutional right to vote. Do not request a voter registration form from your town clerk or return your completed materials to the clerk. Your registration and absentee ballot request should be done through the Safe At Home Coordinator. You may request forms from the Safe at Home Coordinator.

You must complete a Vermont Application for Addition to the Checklist form. You can request this form from the Safe at Home Coordinator. Please note the sample copy which you will receive and which will indicate how to complete the form.

If you have not previously taken the voter’s oath in Vermont, **you must complete a Voter’s Oath for Safe At Home Participant form** and have it notarized.

If you want to vote, you must also place a request to receive absentee ballots for each election in which you wish to vote. Your request must be submitted **no later than 30 days prior to the election** in which you want to vote. **You must submit a Request for Absentee Ballot form.** Fill in your Safe At Home Authorization number in the address, your town of residence; check off the elections for which you would like ballots, sign as “Blind Ballot Voter” and write in the date. **Return the Addition to Checklist form, the Request for Absentee Ballot form and, if applicable, the Voter’s Oath form to: Safe at Home Coordinator, PO Box 1568, Montpelier, VT 05601.** All Blind Ballot voting must be done by absentee ballot. You are not allowed to place a voice vote at your town’s public meetings.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO NEXT?

It is recommended that the first thing you do is **get a new driver's license** using the substitute address rather than your actual address.

Update your records with all state and local agencies from whom you receive services so their records reflect your substitute address. Such as:

PATH (also update with weatherization and oil programs)

Social and Rehabilitative Services

Tax Department

Health Department (if you receive WIC services, make arrangements to meet somewhere in the community, not at your home)

Department of Motor Vehicles (get a new driver's license using substitute address)

Courts

Division of Child Support

Your children's school

Town Clerk (Complete a "Confidentiality Option Form" (included in this Packet), update dog licenses, but apply to vote through the Safe At Home program.)

Ask anyone you correspond with to use the substitute address. Others to notify include:

Friends

Credit Card Companies

Banks

Phone Company

Insurance Company

Telephone Company

Heating/Oil Company

Power Company (NOTE: Although power companies need to know your actual location for maintenance and repair purposes, Green Mountain Power and Central Vermont Public Service have agreed to provide an extra layer of confidentiality for Safe at Home participants in their customer databases. If you are not a customer of either utility company you may wish to inquire with your local utility company to see if they can implement similar changes to your account. See Confidentiality of Utility Records included in this packet.)

NOTE: Private Companies and the Federal Government are not required to accept your substitute address, but they may be willing to. Make sure to ask.

Consider getting an unlisted and unpublished phone number.

PROGRAM CANCELLATION

You may be cancelled from the program if one of the following occurs:

- You fail to notify the Safe At Home Program (SAH) of a change in your address or telephone number within 7 days of when it happens.
- You fail to notify the SAH of a name change within 14 days of the change.

- Your mail is returned to SAH as undeliverable.
- You provide false or incorrect information on your application.
- You file a written request for withdrawal of participation.
- You fail to renew your participation prior to your expiration date.
- You move out of state. Check the Safe At Home website to see if the state you are moving to has an address confidentiality program.

(http://www.sec.state.vt.us/otherprg/safeathome/otherstates_sah.html)