SIA INSURANCE SERVICES

The Year Before You Retire

A month-by-month countdown to your last day of work

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12 Months Out

Pick a date and gather the facts.

- [ ] Choose a target month, not just a year
- [ ] Pull your Social Security statement at ssa.gov
- [ ] Request pension estimates for each option
- [ ] Add up what you actually spend in a year
- [ ] Ask how unused vacation is paid out

9 Months Out

Health coverage drives the timeline.

- [ ] Confirm when employer coverage ends
- [ ] Before 65, price COBRA vs. a marketplace plan
- [ ] Stop HSA deposits six months before Medicare
- [ ] Weigh retiree coverage against your own
- [ ] Note your Medigap enrollment window

6 Months Out

Turn savings into a paycheck.

- [ ] Decide which accounts you draw from first
- [ ] Settle on a Social Security start age
- [ ] Map the first three years of income
- [ ] Set aside cash for year one
- [ ] Revisit how your portfolio is positioned

3 Months Out

Paperwork takes longer than you think.

- [ ] Apply for Medicare in your seven-month window
- [ ] Apply for Social Security up to four months early
- [ ] Confirm your last day in writing
- [ ] Return your pension election forms
- [ ] Ask about converting group life insurance

The Final Weeks

Details that are hard to fix later.

- [ ] Download pay stubs, W-2s, and statements
- [ ] Copy personal files off work devices
- [ ] Confirm final paycheck and payout dates
- [ ] Save contacts before access ends
- [ ] Update your mailing address everywhere

Your Retirement Plan

One choice here is difficult to reverse.

- [ ] Compare leaving it, rolling it, or moving it
- [ ] Ask about company stock before you roll
- [ ] Leaving at 55 or later may open that plan penalty-free
- [ ] Check whether the plan holds after-tax dollars
- [ ] Max your final year of deferrals if you can

Taxes

Your bracket may never be this low again.

- [ ] Expect lower income before RMDs begin
- [ ] Ask whether Roth conversions fit those years
- [ ] Plan for estimated payments or withholding
- [ ] Medicare premiums look back two years
- [ ] Time large gains around your last year

Give Yourself a Year

None of this has to be decided at once.

- [ ] Selling or downsizing the house
- [ ] Moving to a new state
- [ ] Large gifts to children or grandchildren
- [ ] Starting or buying into a business
- [ ] Any lump sum you cannot undo

The First Year Is Rarely Tidy

Almost nobody gets year one exactly right. You may take a part-time job, or find you would rather volunteer, travel, or pick up a new hobby. Retiring mid-year makes the tax picture unlike any year that came before it, and it usually takes several months of real spending before a budget settles into a pattern. Expect some guesswork, and plan on revisiting the numbers once you have lived it. Figuring out what your retirement actually looks like is the work of the first year — not a sign that something has gone wrong.

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