

PUBLIX OFFERS LINK FOR STORM READINESS

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Publix Super Markets is working to show its customers that being prepared for a hurricane is just a few easy clicks away.

The Lakeland-based grocery chain has linked its Web site to a free online service that allows families to create a hurricane preparedness plan tailored to their needs. OneStorm.org is a Web site that bills itself as a one-stop hurricane preparedness, response and recovery resource for residents and businesses.

In addition to offering basic hurricane information, visitors to www.publix.com/storm now can link to OneStorm.org, where they can build a customized plan for staying home or evacuating, develop a shopping list of hurricane supplies, research emergency information, including locations of nearby hurricane shelters, and receive a free flood-risk assessment.

The average user can create a free hurricane plan through OneStorm in about 20 minutes. The Web site offers information in English and Spanish and offers links to the Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency and other Web sites with a similar mission.

"Customers need to think beyond food and water," said spokeswoman Anne Hendricks. In order to encourage area residents to devise a comprehensive hurricane plan for the current storm season as well as shop at Publix, the supermarket chain has partnered with OneStorm, she said.

St. Petersburg-based OneStorm started up in 2005 after founder Chris Bennett, a Harvard University graduate, said he discovered that online resources for hurricane preparedness were lacking.

The company spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to build its secure Web site and now is working to cover those initial costs and continuing operations by offering fee-based services to businesses, Bennett said. OneStorm charges companies to develop disaster plans. Publix is not paying to link its Web site to the OneStorm Web site, he said.

The Web site currently has about 3,000 users and is endorsed by Max Mayfield, former director of the National Hurricane Center, and Bryan Norcross, CBS News' hurricane analyst. By the end of the 2007 hurricane season, OneStorm expects to grow to almost 50,000 users, Bennett said.

The company's goal is to create a culture of preparedness in a society that largely reacts to disasters rather than taking a safe, proactive approach, Bennett said.

"Unfortunately, you're going to see more of the 'Here comes the big storm' approach and people rushing to the store to buy stuff," Bennett said. "The culture hasn't changed yet."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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