



Virginia Department of Emergency Management

News Release

Virginia Department of Emergency Management
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New Emergency Preparedness Tools for Virginians *Virginia is First State to Adopt StargazerNET ReadyLinks*

RICHMOND, VA -- Virginians now have a new way to stay in touch and maintain access to critical news and health and safety information during and after an emergency.

Virginia is the first state in the nation to adopt StargazerNET ReadyLinks™, a Web-based solution to help people, families, groups and organizations be prepared for any kind of disaster or emergency. These simple-to-use tools are available on the Virginia Department of Emergency Management's (VDEM's) Web site at:

<http://www.vaemergency.com/prepare/>

Virginia residents can set up their own secure, personalized place on the Web where they can find information and communicate with others in the event of an emergency, and can create their own personal communications plans.

"From hurricanes to terrorism, Virginians may be exposed to many different types of emergencies and we strongly recommend that everyone prepare a family communications plan," said Michael Cline, state coordinator for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. "We believe that StargazerNET ReadyLinks give families easy-to-use tools to help them in developing that plan. Partnering with the Stargazer Foundation enables us to provide these capabilities to all Virginians at no cost."

ReadyLink types include: FamilyLinks™ (small groups), BusinessLinks™ (organizations or work groups), SchoolLinks™ (any body of students) and CommunityLinks™ (community response). Each type of ReadyLink has a corresponding communications plan available for families, businesses, schools and communities.

These tools are accessible via any Web browser, including public access points such as libraries. VDEM's early adoption of this homeland security tool will also serve as a model for other states.

The StargazerNET ReadyLinks program is offered free of charge by the Stargazer Foundation, a Virginia-based nonprofit dedicated to providing technology and communications solutions for public and nonprofit uses. ReadyLinks supply private places on the Web for people and groups to have their own secure message boards and conference rooms, where they can communicate online to inform each other of their status in the aftermath of any incident. ReadyLinks also afford access to vital media and government information, as well as personalized local information, all from one convenient location. Communications templates for emergency planning can be downloaded, filled out and saved on your own personal computer or printed, filled out and distributed to all group members.

"While the government has a significant role in addressing our nation's preparedness, each one of us is also responsible for securing our families, our homes, our organizations and our communities against threats and acts of terrorism," said Arthur Bushkin, Chairman and CEO of the Stargazer Foundation. "We believe ReadyLinks can be an integral part of the nation's overall emergency preparedness planning by empowering families, groups and communities to take their own steps on their own behalf. Improving access to information and communications can make a big difference in providing for the safety of family members and communities, and for instilling the sense of comfort we all require."