

Inventors hard at work to help us fend off hurricanes

By Robin Benedick
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Did Tropical Storm Alberto give you a scare?

Don't feel helpless. A dizzying array of new products has hit the market to protect homes and belongings.

Companies offer everything from see-through shutters and foam that secures a broken window in place to personal data vaults accessible over the Internet.

Next year, you're likely to see new inventions, including spray-on storm shutters and impact windows that can withstand a bomb blast.

At the Governor's Hurricane Conference in Fort Lauderdale this past May, more than 200 exhibitors and groups paid \$1,500 each for small booths to showcase their wares. That's a record number since the conference began about 14 years ago in a small room at a Tampa hotel, said Lynn Daines, executive vice president of the nonprofit conference, which is based in Tarpon Springs.

Daines expects even more entrepreneurs at next year's conference at the Broward County Convention Center. "We were sold out in space, and we're going to expand it next year," she said.

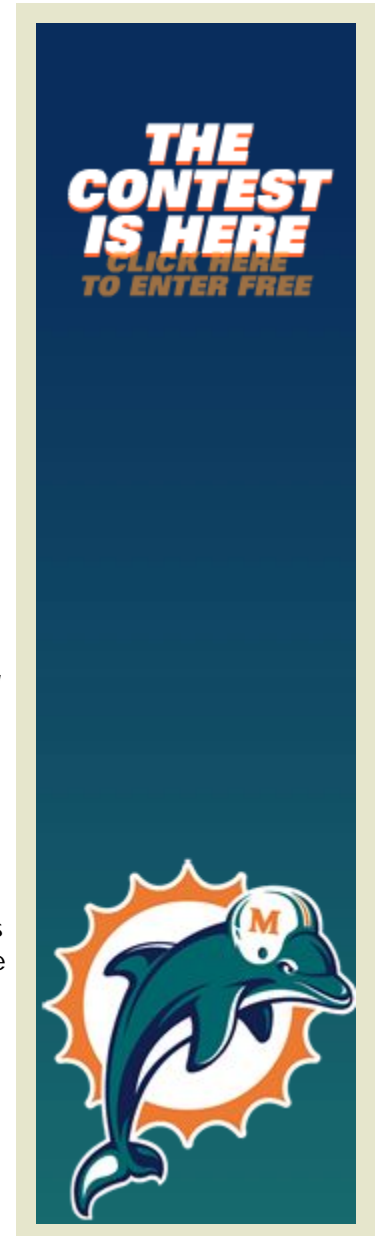
Several companies have introduced new impact-resistant glass windows and vinyl products beefed up with clear plastic laminate or extra silicone glazing. Those impact-resistant products sell for three or four times their regular counterparts. Dave Olmstead, a spokesman and code compliance specialist for PGT Inc., a manufacturer of impact-resistant windows and doors, said the company is testing impact windows so strong they can repel a bomb blast.

With hurricane shutters still hard to get, several companies are touting fabric, plastic or mesh-like hurricane screens that are transparent and made out of polypropylene. They snap into place and can cover an entire side of a house, building or patio.

An owner can leave furniture on a patio and put the screen around it.

If a window cracks during a storm, Aranar Glass Tech in West Palm Beach offers a spray foam that covers the broken window with a film to seal out wind and rain. The Broken Glass Stabilizer sells for \$37.50 for a small kit or \$295 for a big kit. You can see how the product works in a video at www.bgsfoam.com.

"This empowers people to be able to secure any broken window within minutes," said Jeffrey H.



Diamond, the company's president.

In the next few months, Aranar plans to sell a spray-on hurricane shutter made of polyurethane foam and other materials that can withstand hurricane-force winds and later be peeled off.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency advises people to use materials that prevent wind from getting inside and blowing off the roof or plowing down walls, doors or windows. Even if there's no destruction, wind accompanied by driving rain can lead to mold and mildew.

Homeowners should make sure the products they choose are tested and approved to local standards for hurricane protection. They also should make sure companies and workers are licensed and insured, and refuse to give a big down payment.

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