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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS BUSINESS INDUSTRY

**New postal regs putting strain on businesses**

Security concerns make package mailing more difficult

BY MICHELLE L. START  
Florida Weekly Correspondent

A small change in postal policy is causing headaches for local carriers. "We did have a recent change," said post office spokesperson Debra Mitchell. "Now, anything over 13 ounces has to be presented. That is causing a lot of confusion and upset."

Until July 30, senders could mail packages that weighed up to 16 ounces by applying proper postage and stuffing it into a mailbox.

With the new regulations, senders must either go into a post office, use a credit card to purchase postage online or buy a postage machine.

"It's all about being a known mailer," Mitchell said. "We're trying to steer people to buying postage online. That way we know who the sender is."

Mitchell said the post office works with the Federal Aviation Administration and the new regulations are meant to tighten security. The post office contracts with private airlines to carry mail.

It is one of the most recent changes implemented to increase security within a system that has come under attack several times in recent years. For more than 20 years, the Unabomber used the postal service to mail bombs to his victims. In 2001,



COURTESY PHOTO

With the new regulations, package senders must either go into a post office, use a credit card to purchase postage online or buy a postage machine.

anthrax spores were sent through the mail, killing five people and sickening 17 others.

"A lot of businesses often have packages that are more than 13 ounces," said Mitchell. "Now, they can't just mail them."

Word is slow in reaching the public, though.

"We haven't heard that, but I don't think it will affect us, though," said Gary Bryant, president of Good Wheels.

At the Area Agency on Aging, executive director Leigh Schield said the only item that is mailed regularly and might fall under the new regulations is packets to the board

of directors.

"Typically, most of our correspondence doesn't weigh much," she said. "Besides, we're hoping to get to the point that we are more paperless." ■

**Page Field post office getting new look**

The Page Field branch of the U.S. Post Office is undergoing a facelift.

Paint flecking off the exterior and the metal canopy have been eyesores at the building, which is located just north of the airstrip. When a new manager was hired, it was one of the first things she noticed.

"She put in a request to fix it up," said Debra Mitchell, a spokesperson for the U.S. Post Office. "She wants it to look the way it should look. It has been kind of neglected in recent months."

Mitchell said the building is being re-painted and the front is being re-done so as to spruce up the entire building.

Work is expected to be complete within six months.

— Michelle L. Start

**Inc. Magazine: Fort Myers firm growing fast**

Storm Smart only area firm to make list two years in a row

BY JEFF CULL  
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At a time when many companies are pulling in the reins of growth, one Fort Myers-based business keeps expanding.

Storm Smart Building Systems just added its fourth plant in Southwest Florida and is looking at a fifth.

"Our sales in August were three times what they were last August," said Brian Rist, president of Storm Smart.

And, it's those strong sales that have placed Storm Smart on Inc. Magazine's top list of growing companies for the second year in a row.

Last year, the firm ranked 387 out of 500 fastest growing companies nationwide. This year, Inc. expanded the list to 5,000

and altered the criteria. That put Storm Smart at 1,114, but still the highest ranked Fort Myers company.

"It's all about customer service," Rist said. "The majority of the work we do is from word-of-mouth. Plus we have some unique products such as our storm screens."

Rist credits his company's decision to move away from new construction about two years ago (just ahead of the building depression) and buying in to the My Safe Florida Home program as some of the keys to their success.

My Safe Florida Home provides matching grants, up to \$5,000, for homeowners who protect the opening of their dwellings from hurricanes.

Expanding the company's base has also brought in more revenue.

"We were a Southwest Florida company, now we cover Tampa to Marco Island and have a location on the East Coast," Rist said. "We went to a bigger pond to catch more fish."

That also means expanding to Central America and the Caribbean. Storm Smart ships to exotic locals such as Belize,



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO

Brian Rist, Storm Smart's CEO. The company has grown more than 300 percent in that past three years.

Cozumel, Cancun, Jamaica and Mexico. It's mostly for commercial projects such as hotels or restaurants, Rist said, through a network of overseas dealers. The firm is also contemplating a manufacturing plant in Mexico.

But if you really want Rist to give you his formula for success, ask him about his employees.

"The people around here, they really make the things happen," Rist said.

■ **Inside:**  
Q&A: My Safe Florida Home program **A26**

His IT department developed software where the sales force can see real-time information about jobs such as schedules and status anywhere there's a wireless internet connection. And the sales and installation force has achieved a 96 percent good-excellent rates from customers.

"When you work hard, think outside-the-box and be creative, good things will happen," Rist said. ■

**Storm Smart**

>>> **Industry** - hurricane protection

>>> **Founded** - 1996

>>> **Growth (2003-2006)** - 321.9 percent

>>> **2006 revenue** - \$9.8 million

>>> **Employees** - 165

>>> **Website** - www.stormsmart.com