



Best practices

Promoting Mitigation Successes in Alabama

Designed with People with Disabilities in Mind



This is a photo of the entrance to the safe room for Baldwin County's special needs population. Photo by Kathy Fleet.

With a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Baldwin County built a safe room for people with disabilities that serves as a model and showcase for other areas.

Prior to April 2011, the Association for Retarded Citizens of Baldwin County (ARC-BC) relied heavily upon Baldwin Rural Area Transportation System and ARC personal fleet in transporting people with disabilities to safety during impending storms. Clients had to be transported a distance of 200 miles to the Partlow Mental

Health Development Center in Tuscaloosa for emergency shelter.

"I'm responsible for 98 residential homes," said Kathy Fleet, executive director of ARC-BC. "Residential services provide 24-hour care for persons whose mental and emotional disabilities require supervised living. During Hurricane Ivan, it took us eight hours to take the people served by ARC-BC to safety in Tuscaloosa. People with special needs often do not react well to changes in environment and routine, so being able to keep individuals safe in a

familiar setting is a win for all parties. It is critical that our special needs people have a safe place to go in the community and only travel a short distance."

According to Fleet, van access, logistics, exorbitant costs and liability issues in transporting the large number of clients over that distance posed a problem.

ARC-BC's clients range in age from 10 to 76.

Built to FEMA Publication 361 standards, the safe room can accommodate 378 special needs clients during tornadoes, hurricanes and other high wind. The facility also has the capacity to house citizens during extended stays.

The 14,918-square-foot safe room is a 378-bed facility equipped with accessible restrooms and kitchen facilities. The county took into consideration the fact that the residents would need somewhere to stay if their residential facilities sustained storm damage, until repairs were completed.

The total project cost was \$4.3 million. Seventy-five percent of the cost was funded through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

The HMGP provides grants to states and local governments to implement long-term hazard mitigation measures after a major disaster declaration. FEMA provides up to 75 percent of the funding, with the remainder coming from the state or applicant or both. The state administers the program and selects the projects with approval by FEMA.

Applicants, which must have FEMA-approved hazard mitigation plans, may be states, local governments, Indian tribes or certain nonprofits. Funds can be used for long-term mitigation measures, including protection of public or private property.

In addition to meeting FEMA 361 criteria, the facility has been designed to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and has been reviewed and approved by the State of Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

For information on community safe room construction visit: www.fema.gov to access FEMA 361 – “Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms.” Also contact the FEMA Safe Room Help Line at 866-222-3580 or at saferoom@dhs.gov. The help line provides information on where to go for help regarding hazard mitigation grants and other grant funding, project eligibility and guidelines for safe room construction.



Photo showing a portion of the sleeping and dining area located in the safe room. Photo by Kathy Fleet.