

NHMA Safe Room Initiatives

Each year, people lose their lives during tornadoes or hurricanes.

- 539 deaths occurred in the April and May 2011 tornado outbreaks.
- On May 20, 2013 in Moore, OK, an EF 5 tornado killed 24 people, including nine children, and caused \$2B in damages according to the Oklahoma Insurance Department.

While you cannot stop them, **you can provide some protection against tornados with a SafeRoom** that bears the seal of the National Storm Shelter Association.

Do you live in a tornado- or hurricane-prone area? Not all parts of each state are at equal risk from tornadoes, but almost every state has been affected by extreme windstorms. Work with your local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) to determine the level of risk for your community.

Safe room initiatives have been established in communities and states throughout the country. Through such initiatives, approximately 20,000 residential safe rooms have been constructed with federal funding assistance. In addition, tens of thousands of safe rooms have been constructed with private funds. **Safe rooms help provide near absolute protection from dangerous forces of extreme winds.**

Once established, initiatives generally focus on three aspects.

1. Educating the public about safe rooms and their benefits
2. Assuring that safe rooms are built to standards
3. Identifying financial assistance for building safe rooms,

Providing Near Absolution Protection: To provide near absolute protection, safe rooms should be built to withstand wind forces acting on the inside and the outside of the room, and resist damage caused by flying debris. Safe room designs should meet or exceed the FEMA 320/361 guidelines and the ICC-500/NSSA safe room standard.

Identifying Financial Assistance: Funding may be available from federal agencies such as:

- FEMA through the state hazard mitigation office (pre-disaster Mitigation Program or the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program)
- U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA Disaster Loans)
- Department of Housing and Urban Development (annual or post-disaster Community Development Block Grants or HUD-insured loans)

Learn more about construction plans and cost estimates. *Taking Shelter From the Storm: Building a Safe Room for Your Home or Small Business* (FEMA P-320) is a FEMA publication that includes construction plans and cost estimates. FEMA also provides guidance for community safe rooms in *Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms* (FEMA P-361).

Are there are examples of successful initiatives? Oklahoma, in conjunction with FEMA, was the first state to establish a rebate program. Other states have since followed suit. Several case studies can be found on the FEMA website (<http://www.fema.gov/plan/prevent/bestpractices/casestudies.shtm>)



Tom Cook's wife was killed in 2008 when a tornado destroyed their Missouri home. He and his daughter rebuilt in Joplin, MO-- this time adding a safe room in the garage. When the EF 5 tornado destroyed their new home in 2011, they both survived. Several of their neighbors died. See video. [See video.](#)

Successful Safe Room Initiatives:

Alabama Partnership Brings Safe Rooms to Low Income Residents: A unique application of the safe room program, not using HMGP funds, was accomplished in Jefferson County in April 2002.

An affordable housing partnership, including:

- The Greater Birmingham Habitat for Humanity
- Community Housing Development Corporation of Alabama
- YW Homes, and other non-profit affordable housing developers

Together, they built a subdivision to provide replacement housing for low-income families who lost their homes in a 1998 tornado. Each of the 80 houses in the subdivision included a safe room as part of the construction. A community shelter was constructed adjacent to a park area that would service not only this subdivision but also the surrounding community.

Iowa Non-Profit Provides a Safe Room for Mentally Disabled: Mainstream Living, Inc., a Non-Profit Organization, provided a safe room in a home for four mentally disabled residents. The shelter had to be designed for individuals with mobility issues and was designed to meet local ADA requirements.

Sedgwick County, Kansas and the City of St. Joseph, Missouri, Require Manufactured Home Communities to Have Storm Shelters:

- Sedgwick County passed a resolution that requires manufactured home communities to provide storm shelters for their residents. The resolution (02-00) was effective for Sedgwick County beginning on July 1, 2000. It requires that every manufactured home neighborhood of 10 or more manufactured home spaces provide above-grade or below-grade storm shelters.
- The City of St. Joseph established an ordinance that requires manufactured home communities to provide storm shelters for their residents. All storm

shelters are required to meet local Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and the design criteria set forth by FEMA 361.

Habitat for Humanity Builds Safe Rooms in 10 Missouri Homes: The Habitat for Humanity Northland coordinated the construction of safe rooms in 10 of their homes.

Hawaii Offers Tax Incentives for Safe Rooms: The Safe Room Ordinance Tax Incentive was established in September 2000, by the Council of the County of Kauai, State of Hawaii, as Ordinance number 752; Bill number 1958. The purpose of the ordinance is to provide property tax exemption to residential homeowners who construct safe rooms in their homes.

The ordinance defines a safe room as "a windowless, accessible room designed for wind loads of 250 miles per hour," located out of an area susceptible to flooding, and that provides safety from roof or housing collapse, flying debris, and storm surge or flooding. The specific language of the ordinance is residential buildings or accessory buildings to a residence certified as containing one or more safe rooms shall receive an exemption of \$40,000 per residence.

Communities Helped by Tornado Shelters Act of 2003: The Tornado Shelters Act was enacted in December 3, 2003 to amend the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. It authorizes communities to use CDBG funds to build safe shelters in manufactured home parks. To be eligible, a shelter must be located in a neighborhood or park that contains at least 20 units, consists predominately of low- and moderate-income households, and is in a state where a tornado has occurred within the current or last 3 years. The shelter must comply with tornado-appropriate safety and construction standards, be large enough to accommodate all members of the park/neighborhood, and be located in a park/neighborhood that has a warning siren.