

FEMA Public Assistance: Safe Rooms and Storm Shelters

What are Safe Rooms and Storm Shelters?

Every year, tornadoes, hurricanes, and other extreme windstorms cause numerous injuries and deaths in the United States. The use of safe rooms and storm shelters during violent storms can significantly reduce risk of personal harm.

Safe rooms are hardened structures specifically designed to meet the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) criteria and provide near-absolute protection in extreme wind events, including tornadoes and hurricanes.¹ To be considered a safe room, the structure must be designed and constructed to the guidelines specified in FEMA Publication 361 (FEMA P-361), *Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes: Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms*.²

Storm shelters are defined as buildings, structures, or portions thereof that a building operator designates for use during tornadoes, hurricanes, and other severe windstorms. Storm shelters are specifically designed to meet the criteria described in the latest published edition of the International Code Council's (ICC) *ICC/NSSA Standard for Design and Construction of Storm Shelters (ICC 500)*.³

Emergency Work

Under Section 403 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act), FEMA considers safe rooms for temporary school facilities as an eligible emergency protective measure.⁴ Funding for accessible safe rooms as part of a temporary school facility may be eligible if the disaster-damaged school contained a safe room or other space that served as a storm shelter and there are no other cost-effective, reasonable alternatives available to address the safety needs of the students and faculty. If approved, the safe room capacity is based on the quantity and needs of students and faculty/staff who are expected to use the temporary school facility. The capacity of the

¹ [Safe Rooms | FEMA.gov](#)

² FEMA P-361, Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes. [fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_safe-rooms-for-tornadoes-and-hurricanes_p-361.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_safe-rooms-for-tornadoes-and-hurricanes_p-361.pdf)

³ Chapter 2 Definitions, 2020 ICC 500 ICC/NSSA Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters | ICC Digital Codes (iccsafe.org), <https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/ICC5002020P1/chapter-2-definitions>.

⁴ Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Pub. L. No. 93-288, § 403 (1974) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 5170b) [hereinafter "Stafford Act"].



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safe room cannot exceed the pre-disaster capacity of the safe room in the damaged school. The safe room should be available no later than the opening day of classes at the temporary facility.

If the Applicant wishes to seek funding for a safe room as part of a temporary school facility, it must obtain prior approval from FEMA. For more information, refer to the Temporary Relocation of Essential Services section of the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide.⁵

Safe rooms provided as part of a temporary school facility must comply with the requirements of [Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes, Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms \(FEMA P-361\)](#). The timeframe for providing Public Assistance (PA) funding for the temporary safe room space coincides with the approved timeframe for providing PA funding for the temporary school facility.⁶

Permanent Work

Section 406 of the Stafford Act provides FEMA the authority to fund the permanent restoration of an eligible Applicant's disaster-damaged facilities. The PA Program requires that Applicants repair/replace structures to, at a minimum, the latest edition of the International Code Council's ICC-500.⁷ ICC-500 provides minimum design and construction requirements for storm shelters that provide a safe refuge from storms producing high winds, hurricanes, and tornadoes. ICC-500 contains design requirements for the main wind-resisting structural system and components and cladding of these shelters and provides basic occupant life, safety, and health requirements for these shelters.

ICC-500 only applies to certain types of facilities and work (e.g., 911 call stations; emergency operation centers; fire, rescue, ambulance, and police stations; and most K-12 schools) located in high-wind areas (defined in the ICC-500).

- 1) **New Construction:** For the replacement of destroyed facilities or improved/alternate projects involving new construction, the addition of safe rooms for new construction in high-wind zones is eligible for certain facility types.
- 2) **Repairs of existing buildings:**
 - a. ***Repairs to existing buildings with storm shelters or safe rooms:*** Buildings with storm shelters or safe rooms that were damaged would be required to be evaluated and repaired or replaced as needed in

⁵ [FEMA PUBLIC ASSISTANCE | FEMA.gov, https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/fema-public-assistance.](https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/fema-public-assistance)

⁶ Refer to PA Program and Policy Guide (PAPPG), version 4, page 132.

⁷ Published by the ICC and the National Storm Shelter Association (NSSA), the ICC/NSSA Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters (ICC 500) is a referenced standard in the International Codes (I-Codes). ICC 500 applies to the design, construction, installation, and inspection of community and residential storm shelters. The ICC 500 standard presents design criteria for tornado and hurricane storm shelters that are like safe rooms constructed to FEMA P-361 criteria, although slightly less conservative. [https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/ICC5002020P1/icc-nssa-standard-for-the-design-and-construction-of-storm-shelters.](https://codes.iccsafe.org/content/ICC5002020P1/icc-nssa-standard-for-the-design-and-construction-of-storm-shelters)

accordance with Section 113 (Evaluation, Maintenance and Repairs) of the latest published edition of ICC-500.

- b. ***Repairs to existing buildings without storm shelters or safe rooms:*** Buildings without storm shelters or safe rooms do not have the requirement to add a safe room, even in cases of substantial damage or substantial structural damage.

Other Sources of Funding

Other federal programs that provide funds for safe room construction include: FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Additionally, many states have developed initiatives for the construction of residential, public, and private safe rooms including safe rooms in hospitals; emergency operations centers; first responder facilities; schools; day care centers; manufactured home parks; private residences; community centers; senior centers; and campgrounds. For more information about safe room funding and initiatives, visit this link:

<http://www.fema.gov/safe-rooms/public-and-community-safe-rooms>.