

MISSISSIPPI SAFE ROOM INITIATIVE



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the “Safe Place To Go” Initiative?

A: The State, in partnership with FEMA and participating county Emergency Management Agencies, have made available limited Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds to those declared counties to be used to construct/install community or individual Safe Rooms or Storm Shelters.

Q: What is a Safe Room?

A: A Safe Room is a reinforced room built in a new or existing structure that can provide greater protection for residents in the path of severe storms and tornadoes. The FEMA publication #320, “Taking Shelter From the Storm,” contains recommended construction plans for a Safe Room. To obtain a free copy of the publication, call 1-888-565-3896, or visit the FEMA web site at (www.fema.gov/mit/tsfs01.htm).

Q: Who is eligible for a Safe Room/Storm Shelter Grant?

A: The available Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds are available only to the participating counties that are included in the Federally Declared Disaster areas. The State priority is to first make the grant funds available through the local EMA office to homeowners, businesses, government installations and private non-profit corporations that sustained documented damage to their structures. The second priority is to offer the grants to those within the declared areas that did not sustain damage. The local Emergency Management Director will establish the county priorities and administer the program locally.

Q: Who do I make an application to and where do I obtain an application?

A: Your participating county Emergency Management Agency or Civil Defense Director's office has the form, as do the FEMA operated Disaster Recovery Centers. The applications should be turned in to the local emergency management office. They will collect the applications and submit them to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency as a complete countywide packet prior to May 15, 2001.

Q: What is the construction criterion for an application?

A: First, the construction must meet the written specifications publicized by the FEMA Publication #320; secondly, the installation of an underground or in-ground shelter must meet the National Performance Criteria for Tornado Shelters, also found at (www.fema.gov/library/ts5-28.doc); thirdly, the construction of a community shelter must meet FEMA specifications as stated in Publication 361; and lastly, due to limited funds, grant amounts must be set at 75% of the eligible cost, and may not exceed \$3,500.00 for a residential shelter and \$5,000.00 for a community or critical facility shelter.

Q: I live in a flood zone, can I install a below ground shelter on my property?

A: No, the shelter must be above ground and above the Base Flood Elevation. This would limit you to the Safe Room option only. This applies only to locations within the floodplain.

Q: Who will establish the priorities for the funding of the Safe Rooms and Storm Shelters within the counties?

A: The local Emergency Management Agency director is responsible for the supervision and establishment of the local strategy. As an example, the county may decide not to fund individual shelters and only submit requests for community wide shelters, or a combination of both, depending on the local needs.

Q: I built a Safe Room/Storm Shelter prior to the February 16th storm incident date, am I eligible for any reimbursement under this program?

A: No. Additionally, in accordance with FEMA regulations, only those shelters and rooms constructed after the FEMA final approval of the local project grant are eligible.

Q: What type of documentation must I present to receive reimbursement?

A: The local civil defense/emergency management agency has the forms that will be required for reimbursement. This consists of a 'Validation Form' that is completed by the applicant and is certified by the licensed contractor, architect or engineer who completes the installation, which states that the shelter meets or exceeds the guidelines and standards provided in the FEMA Publication 320. Copies of checks and receipts of all eligible costs will also be required.

Q: How much money will FEMA provide?

A: The Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Federal share cannot exceed 75% of the eligible project cost. A non-Federal share (25%) may be provided by the community, by the home or business owner or any other non-Federal source. The non-Federal share may be cash or in-kind contributions. Each county program may differ, according to the local priorities established by the county.

Q: My home was destroyed by the storm and I am not rebuilding in the same location, am I still eligible for an application to this program?

A: Yes, as long as you install the shelter within a declared county.

Q: I need to have my Safe Room/Underground Shelter money up front to pay my contractor. Is this possible?

A: No. The available grant money is only reimbursed after the construction is completed. You have submit signed and notarized documentation from your contractor stating that the Safe Room or underground shelter meets or exceeds the specifications as set forth in the FEMA publication 320, and the National Performance Criteria for Tornado Shelters. You must also provide documentation of eligible cost such as contracts, receipts and proof of payments.

Q: I don't want to build my Safe Room or Storm Shelter until several months from now. Can I still get the reimbursement?

A: Yes, as long as you meet the eligibility requirements and submit your individual application to your local participating EMA prior to May 15, 2001 and meet the local permitting requirements in your community which may have a time limit between the permit date and the contract-to-start-work date.