



FEMA

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
PARTNERS IN SHAPING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



Environmental and Historic Preservation (EHP) Fact Sheet: Residential and Non-Residential Safe Rooms

Environmental resources, cultural institutions, and historic assets define communities and contribute to their well-being and unique character. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) plays a critical role in helping communities incorporate environmental stewardship and historic preservation into emergency management decisions. As disasters continue to challenge our nation and communities grapple with issues of preparedness and sustainability, FEMA offers expertise to ensure both legal compliance and informed local, State, Tribal, and national planning.

Residential and Non-Residential Safe Rooms and EHP Review

FEMA's grant programs provide funding to eligible applicants to construct residential and non-residential safe rooms that offer protection to building occupants during extreme wind events. These safe rooms may be built within or connected to existing structures, may be incorporated into proposed new facilities, or be stand-alone units. They may be built above or below ground. The design criteria for residential and non-residential safe rooms are outlined in FEMA 320: *Taking Shelter from the Storm: Building a Safe Room for Your Home or Small Business* (August 2008) and FEMA 361: *Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms* (August 2008).

Safe room project designs must take into consideration potential impacts on a wide variety of environmental and historical resources, such as wetlands, floodplains, historic structures, and archaeological sites. A safe room constructed within or attached to a building that is listed in or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places may have an adverse effect on a historic building. Additionally, ground disturbing activities (particularly those occurring on previously undisturbed ground) have the potential to affect significant archaeological resources. Before grant funding can be approved, FEMA must review each project location to ensure that they meet EHP laws, regulations, and executive orders.

Considering EHP Impacts

FEMA carefully reviews each safe room project to assess potential impacts. FEMA has developed a nationwide Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) that addresses review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and facilitates agency compliance with other laws and regulations by providing a framework to address impacts of safe room construction. This PEA allows FEMA to coordinate and integrate to the maximum extent possible the process conducted to comply with laws, policies and executive orders, such as the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Endangered Species Act, and Executive Orders 11988 (Floodplain Management) and 11990 (Protection of Wetlands).

Early identification of the presence of historic properties, floodplains, wetlands and other resources and coordination with resource agencies prior to submitting project applications to FEMA can assist in identifying areas of concern in the preliminary phases of project development and can help to reduce EHP review time.

EHP Considerations for Residential and Non-Residential Safe Rooms

When planning a project, remember that FEMA will only consider applications consistent with FEMA Publications 320 and 361 located outside the following high hazard areas:

- The Coastal High Hazard Area (VE zones) or other areas known to be subject to high-velocity wave action; or
- Areas seaward of the Limit of Moderate Wave Action (LiMWA) where mapped, also referred to as the Coastal A Zone in ASCE 24-05, or
- Floodways

Individual Safe Rooms: EHP Review Checklist

The checklist below describes information that FEMA requires in order to complete EHP review of an individual safe room project.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Location	State the location of the project, including both the site address and latitude/longitude in decimal degrees (e.g., 38.5342° N, -77.0212° W). Provide maps (including Flood Insurance Rate Map(s) with project location(s) marked, aerial imagery, or drawings showing the location of the individual safe room project.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Description of Project Scope of Work	Provide a scope of work for the project, including plans for staging areas, grading, and extent of ground disturbance. Note whether the project involves previously undisturbed soils; for stand-alone safe rooms, provide information on prior and current land use.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Age of Existing Buildings	Provide the original date of construction for any structure that is being modified (both for safe rooms being incorporated within an existing building and those built as additions) as well as for any structures that are located within the viewshed of the project.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs	Provide clear, color photographs of the site, including any existing buildings, and a 360-degree view of the surrounding area. Label photographs with the location and orientation of the camera relative to the construction site.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Agency Coordination	Coordinating with applicable resource agencies prior to submitting your application to FEMA can help streamline EHP review. Please note any communications and provide copies of correspondence and permits.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Additional Information	Include copies of other relevant information, such as environmental site assessments, permits or permit requirements, environmental mitigation requirements, historic property designations or surveys, including archaeological surveys.

Timeframes for EHP Review

Timeframes for EHP review vary depending on a project's potential to impact the environment and the complexity of the proposed project, including the number of safe rooms in the application. For projects that fall under the PEA, do not affect historic properties, and do not require additional agency consultation or completion of a Supplemental Environmental Assessment (SEA), the review process generally takes 30 days after FEMA has received a complete project application. Preparation of an SEA will generally require three to six months, although a particularly complex project may require a longer preparation time. Any additional consultation required to resolve impacts identified under Section 106 of the NHPA and other environmental laws and regulations will extend the review period a minimum of 60 to 90 days, as it involves outside resource agencies and other stakeholders.

EHP Best Practice: Alabama Residential Safe Room Project

In the aftermath of the April 25-28, 2011, tornado outbreak, the largest single-system tornado outbreak ever recorded, FEMA worked with the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA) to install residential safe rooms in communities throughout the state. In order to streamline review, AEMA developed an application process that required the systematic collection of information needed for EHP review, such as site photographs, maps, floodplain and wetlands locations, and the presence of historic properties. A FEMA EHP specialist then reviewed the project for potential EHP impacts. By ensuring that relevant EHP information was provided before forwarding these projects to FEMA, AEMA greatly expedited the EHP review process.

Additional Resources: For more information on EHP review and FEMA grant assistance, contact your State Emergency Management Agency or Tribal Office or visit <http://www.fema.gov/environmental-planning-and-historic-preservation-program>.