



FEMA

Safe Rooms Add Life to Neighborhoods

Oklahoma City, OK - Residents of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area wonder each year what May weather will bring. In May 1999, multiple tornadoes left 44 dead and more than 8,000 buildings damaged or destroyed. Four years later another May tornado, closely following the 1999 path, imposed far less damage. All because residents as well as City and State officials embraced mitigation measures leading to safe rooms being built in neighborhood schools across the City.

Following the May 1999 outbreak, the State looked to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to provide money for building safe rooms. The HMGP funds were also used as part of a rebate program to encourage the building of safe rooms in schools. Oklahoma City's Program Manager Eric Wenger said, "We participated in the [safe room] project because we had a number of schools facing rebuilding or remodeling, so we seized the opportunity."

Several schools chosen for the safe room project were already part of a City-wide school revitalization program called MAPS for Kids, the second phase of a program for Metropolitan Area Public Schools (MAPS). In 2001, Oklahoma City voters approved for the MAPS program to be funded with a penny sales tax increase and a bond issue for a total funding of \$680 million over a 10-year period. The MAPS funds generated would be used to renovate and revitalize neighborhood schools. In addition, the \$2,291,250 in HMGP funds allowed the construction of safe rooms for five MAPS for Kids schools: four new facilities and one renovation project.

Safe room construction, which began in April 2004, complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act design specifications as well as FEMA 361, Design and Construction Guidelines for Community Shelters. MAPS for Kids also designed the school safe rooms as multi-use facilities, doubling as locker rooms, classrooms, dance studios, or music rooms.

The combined funding efforts of MAPS for Kids and FEMA's HMGP have helped re-energize not only schools but also surrounding neighborhoods as well.

"The MAPS for Kids program is revitalizing many Oklahoma City neighborhoods and the school projects have helped us add to the overall successes of the community," Wenger said. "Now when we build new schools, patrons ask if the project will include a safe room."



Oklahoma County,
Oklahoma



Quick Facts

Year:

2002

Sector:

Public

Cost:

\$2,291,250.00 (Actual)

Primary Activity/Project:

Safe Rooms/Community Shelters

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)