



Southern Missouri Tornado Shelter Serves Community in Good Weather and Bad

Full Mitigation Best Practice Story

Howell County, Missouri

Howell County, MO - Should disaster strike, residents of West Plains, Missouri won't have any difficulty finding the City's safe room. Chances are they've already used it for a school event, civic club dinner, bake sale, or other community function.



"It gets tons of use," said Dr. Fred Czerkwonka, assistant superintendent of the West Plains School District. "It's a wonderful asset to the community, the school, and the children."

The tornado-resistant safe room's primary use is as the gymnasium at the district's middle school. Built to the exacting standards set by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), it opened on August, 14, 2007. At 15,600 square feet, the West Plains safe room is capable of holding 3,120 people, nearly one-third the city's population.

The safe room was built using special funding incentives from FEMA, which paid for 75 percent (about \$2 million) of the \$2.8 million project. The school district funded the remaining balance through its capital projects account.

The West Plains safe room was the fourth in the State built specifically for community use. The first was a small, single-purpose sports complex that holds 150 located in Bolivar, Missouri just north of Springfield. There are now 14 safe rooms in the State. Many are in smaller Missouri communities, in schools, and on college campuses.

"FEMA is a hero in these small communities," said Stevens Randy Scrivner, branch chief for Logistics/Mitigation/Floodplain Management with the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). "Governor Matt Blunt has been an outstanding supporter of the safe room program to help out Missouri schools, colleges, universities, and communities."

Similar shelters are planned. "We're looking at just about any place interested in having a safe room," said Scrivner. With good reason: According to the National Weather Service, since 2003 Missouri has experienced 341 tornadoes through May 2008, resulting in 43 fatalities.

A State program is currently underway to educate Missourians to the dangers of high-wind events and to promote safe rooms for both community and individual use.

"In cities like West Plains," said Scrivner, "The message is 'Now you have a place to go. Don't wait for the siren.'"

Activity/Project Location

Geographical Area: **Single County in a State**

FEMA Region: **Region VII**

State: **Missouri**

County: **Howell County**

City/Community: **West Plains**

Key Activity/Project Information

Sector: **Public**
Hazard Type: **Winter Storm; Severe Storm; Tornado; Hurricane/Tropical Storm; Extreme Temperatures; Fire**
Activity/Project Type: **Safe Rooms/Community Shelters**
Activity/Project Start Date: **05/2007**
Activity/Project End Date: **08/2007**
Funding Source: **Other FEMA funds/ US Department of Homeland Security**

Activity/Project Economic Analysis

Cost: **Amount Not Available**
Non FEMA Cost: **0**

Activity/Project Disaster Information

Mitigation Resulted From Federal Disaster? **No**
Value Tested By Disaster? **Unknown**
Repetitive Loss Property? **No**

Reference URLs

No URLs were submitted

Main Points

No Main Points were entered.



West Plains, MO, middle school identified as tornado shelter



Principal Scott Smith shows the heavy steel inside window shutter