

## Safe Room Protects Oklahoma Family

**MOORE, OK** – When a massive tornado was sweeping across central Oklahoma on May 20, 2013, Mindy Chaddock and nine family members quickly took refuge in her mother’s underground safe room. The house above them was reduced to rubble, but the family survived.

As the day began, there was little indication that an EF-5 tornado would soon take the lives of 24 people, including 10 children, and destroy 1,200 homes.

Chaddock and her mother, Linda Laister, attended a talent show at one of the local schools. After the program was over, Chaddock began receiving telephone weather alerts about the impending tornado. Just after 3 p.m., as they drove into Laister’s carport, the weather sirens began blaring.

Her sister, Connie Blalock, and other family members soon arrived and everyone descended into the safe room. “The safe room was designed to hold 10-12 people and we would have asked others but there wasn’t time,” said Chaddock.

The sisters worked together to close the latches inside the safe room door. “It was a blessing that my mother was with me that day,” said Chaddock, “because it would have been difficult for her to get inside and secure the door alone.”

Within 20 minutes the powerful tornado was right above them. “It was a horrific experience. It was a slow moving storm and it seems like it lasted forever,” said Chaddock.

“The noise was so loud that we couldn’t hear each other and it was pitch black in there. Although there were flashlights inside, we didn’t have time to think about them. We could hear the sound of flying debris and the entire ground was shaking. I don’t see how you could have survived in a bathtub or a closet, because even in the safe room we were scared for our lives. That’s how strong it was.”

After the family emerged from the safe room, they were stunned at what they saw. Laister’s house was gone and nothing was salvageable. Their cars were smashed and the entire neighborhood was in rubble. Directly across the street were the scattered ruins of Towers Plaza Elementary School. Later they found out that Blalock’s house, a few streets over, had also been destroyed.

Chaddock grew up in the neighborhood and remembers the tornadoes that devastated Moore in 1999 and 2003, but neither was as terrifying or destructive as this latest tornado.

It was memories of that 1999 tornado that inspired Laister to apply for a \$2,500 grant from the [Chickasaw Nation Storm Shelter Program](#), designed to provide storm shelters for Chickasaw citizens who privately own their homes. After the installation, Laister immediately registered the safe house with the [Moore Fire Department](#).

Although safe rooms of all types performed well during the 2013 tornado, Chaddock is an advocate of the six-by-eight foot, in-ground unit that she and her family took shelter in. “The slanted door helped with the debris,” said Chaddock.



The concrete safe room received damage to the vent, but otherwise survived the tornado intact.

Chaddock is thankful to the Chickasaw Tribe for providing the safe room for her mother and she hopes everyone knows how important shelters are, no matter the cost. "It's 100 percent worth it if you value your life," said Chaddock.

For additional information on safe rooms, log onto: [www.FEMA.gov/safe-rooms](http://www.FEMA.gov/safe-rooms).