

## A Safe Place to Call Home

The residents of the Bay View Heights community in Dunn Wisconsin now have one less thing to worry about if a tornado strikes, thanks to a safe room constructed in their community in 2009. The safe room is designed to withstand wind speeds up to 250 mph and can temporarily hold over 400 people. Built with 12-inch-thick walls, the safe room offers a place of protection during a tornado, for residents of Dane County who would otherwise be left to fend for themselves. Before the safe room was constructed, residents were forced to try to flee the area and find shelter in neighboring towns or to brave it out in their manufactured homes. The planning for the safe room did not happen overnight; it took years of work, patience and motivation.

Cathy Hasslinger, Town of Dunn Clerk Treasurer, was an advocate for building the safe room long before its existence, "The Town of Dunn identified this as a need, and the county identified this as a need, and we spent an awfully long time; over a decade working on all the possible solutions." The safe room project planning started over 15 years ago, when a number of tornados hit the Dane County area and came within a half mile of the Bay View homes twice. It was then that others began to understand the importance of this project.

Working alongside Roxanne Gray, the former Wisconsin State Hazard Mitigation Officer, and with Anna Pudlo from FEMA, the town was able to get the wheels turning for the safe room project. Thanks to a \$30,000 Community Development Block Grant from Dane County and a grant from FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) program for \$487,800, it was able to happen. The town of Dunn spent an additional \$12,977 to cover unexpected costs. Ed Minihan, Dunn's Town Chair, also agreed that a safe room was a top priority for the community.

FEMA's PDM program was created to help reduce the risk to people and their property by taking action before a disaster strikes. It is a nationally competitive grant program that addresses many types of natural hazards. Under the PDM program, which is available to States, Territories, Commonwealths and Indian Tribal governments, communities can continue to achieve a higher level of risk management capability through hazard mitigation planning and mitigation projects. Communities like Dunn can apply for PDM funding as a subapplicant through their state or territory office that has the primary emergency management responsibility. Applications are accepted annually and funding amounts vary every fiscal year. For Hasslinger and Minihan it was a great opportunity to take action and help their community. Minihan realizes how important it is to prepare before disasters strike, "We're encouraged that FEMA is taking this route in focusing on prevention, we really think it's a great way to go."

Designed with the residents' comfort in mind during a disaster, windows were installed to allow people to see outside if needed before and after tornado warnings. The windows were specially designed and can withstand projectiles flying at up to 200 mph. In addition, shutters were installed for maximum protection. The shutters can withstand projectiles flying at up to 250 mph. The roof is made up of panels so that if part of it is destroyed the rest will not fall.

The benefits of this project are reflected in the number of times it has already been opened for use. Since its official opening in 2009, the safe room has been opened for use 15-20 times a year for inclement weather. It has also been used for social and outreach events designed to help residents become familiar with the area and feel confident using the safe room. It has also been used in harsh



winters and hot summers—allowing residents a place to warm up or cool down when their homes could not keep up with the weather. For Hasslinger, there was simply no other way to protect Dunn's residents, "When you're talking about loss of life, it's the only way. If you're not in front of it, and you can't save a life after it's gone, the only way to save lives is to be doing this proactive work on the front end."

Protecting your family and home during a disaster does not have to be as big as building a safe room for more than 400 people. It can be a task as simple as installing hurricane shutters. To learn more about how to prepare your family and pets for tornadoes in Wisconsin, visit [http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/tornado/home\\_work\\_safety.asp](http://readywisconsin.wi.gov/tornado/home_work_safety.asp). For more information on safe rooms, go to <http://www.fema.gov/safe-rooms>.

Minihan appreciates the help he has had from FEMA and feels that it is cheaper in the long run to take action now rather than later. Taking time to mitigate your home now can save the hassle of trying to fix it after it is damaged and it could save your life. For Minihan "it's not a matter of if, it's a matter of when. This facility is going to save lives, there is no doubt about it."