



ICC NEWS RELEASE

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Storm Shelters, Safe Rooms Save Lives when Tornadoes, Hurricanes Strike

Building Safety Month—the International Code Council's educational public safety campaign—focuses on saving lives during high-wind events

The EF5 tornado with 200 mph winds that caused death and destruction in Oklahoma serves as a stark reminder that storm shelters, also called safe rooms, save lives. After almost every tornado in recent years, there have been dramatic examples of survivors who lived through killer storms because the home or other building they were in had a safe room.

May is [Building Safety Month](#), an educational public safety campaign developed by the International Code Council in 1980. Building Safety Month recognizes the important work [code officials](#) are charged with, including inspecting homes and buildings during construction and remodeling to ensure public safety and make sure the places where you live, work and play are safe.

In 2008, the International Code Council (ICC) and the National Storm Shelter Association (NSSA) completed publication of a standard that provides requirements for the design and construction of storm shelters. It addresses small, residential safe rooms in residences as well as large community storm shelters to protect people from the violent winds of hurricanes and tornadoes. Shelters built to the standard can be designed to withstand wind speeds up to 250 mph. That requirement is for tornado shelters in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma and Ohio, and parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin.

High-wind speeds produce flying debris turning construction materials, furniture, appliances and just about anything into deadly missiles. The standard requires that walls, windows and doors are tested to withstand flying projectiles.

Tornado storm shelters are required to house people for two hours and include minimum requirements for ventilation, sanitation facilities, a fire extinguisher, lighting and other minimal power needs.

A storm shelter does not need to be a separate space or structure. A shelter can be a “hardened” room inside a building that is used normally for other purposes. For instance, schools often use a classroom or group of classrooms, a gymnasium, or library as a shelter. The walls, doors, ceilings and windows are then designed to withstand the higher wind loads and flying debris.

The *2015 International Building Code*, developed by ICC Members, will require storm shelters in newly built schools. Resources for safe rooms include the ICC/NSSA [Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters](#), [High Wind Safe Rooms](#) and a [Tale of Two Homes](#).

The [International Code Council](#) is a member-focused association. It is dedicated to developing model codes and standards used in the design, build and compliance process to construct safe, sustainable, affordable and resilient structures. Most U.S. communities and many global markets [choose the International Codes](#).

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