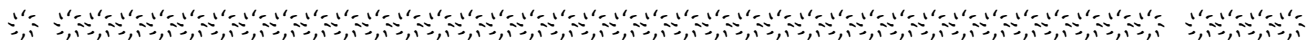


**Cooke County
Office of Emergency Management
Individual Safe Room Program
Guidelines**



*Funding for this program made possible by the Texas Division of Emergency Management and
the Federal Emergency Management Agency*

Cooke County Office of Emergency Management Residential Safe Room Rebate Program Guidelines General Overview

The Cooke County Office of Emergency Management (CCOEM) is implementing a Safe Room/Storm Shelter Rebate Program (The Program). The Program is being funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM).

- This program is only intended to serve property owners of Cooke County.
- The FEMA program rules state the applicants must be the owner of the home at the time of rebate award in which the safe room is to be built. Cooke County also restricts program participation to property owners who use the property as their residence or lease out the proposed location for residential use. Cooke County does not allow participation of builders/developers in the Program. The rules also require the home be a single family dwelling, or ground floor only multi-family dwelling such as a duplex or fourplex, that lies outside a FEMA or locally mapped 100 - year floodplain.
- FEMA Floodplain map link <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search>
- For the purpose of this program, a safe room/storm shelter is an above or below ground unit built to the FEMA P-320, Sixth Edition (Taking Shelter from the Storm), FEMA P-361, Fourth Edition (Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes), and ICC 500-2023 design standards. A safe room built according to these standards is expected to withstand the forces imposed on it by extreme winds without failing. The only units authorized for rebate support under this program will be units certified as meeting the FEMA P-320, FEMA P-361 and ICC 500-2012 standards
- This is a 50:50 matching program that will provide homeowners a rebate of up to \$3,000 to offset the cost of installing a safe room/storm shelter, built to current FEMA design standard requirements, in a residence. Homeowners must first apply for a rebate and receive a written confirmation of rebate award from CCOEM before being assured of receiving this assistance. The application will be used to determine eligibility. The applicant must pay 100% for the safe room upfront.
- Participation is voluntary. Your signature on the Signed Statement of Voluntary Participation designates that an applicant is choosing to participate in the rebate program of their own volition.
- Rebates are not transferrable. Rebate awards are only applicable to the recipient(s) named in the original application received by CCOEM and cannot be transferred to another person. Homeowner must provide proof of payment in full. Payments from family members or any other person on behalf of the applicant is considered a gift and is considered a duplication of benefits and therefore not allowed.

- Applicant must agree to have the shelter’s Latitude/Longitude (GPS) information be submitted to CCOEM for inclusion in any relevant public safety databases. This release could allow first responders to more quickly locate persons in the event of emergency that impacts the users ability to exit the shelter or if they require emergency assistance in the shelter. Your signature on the *Signed Statement of Voluntary Participation* designates that you agree to have the Latitude/Longitude information submitted to these databases. See Question 3.8 in the FAQs below for more details on how to obtain your GPS coordinates.
- The rebate program is **not** retroactive. Any safe rooms/storm shelters begun prior to an applicant receiving a rebate award notification from CCOEM is not eligible for rebate. Only those shelters approved and fully completed during the designated Period of Performance (**24 Feb 2026-18 Feb 2027**) are eligible for the rebate (saferooms installed in the period of performance **before** receiving their acceptance letter **are not eligible for this program**).
- Applicant must agree to have CCOEM representatives conduct a site visit after installation, to take photographs of the shelter and verify its location. These actions by CCOEM representatives must be taken maintain eligibility for the rebate.
- Applicant must submit all necessary paperwork to CCOEM as required by the Program to be eligible for a rebate, which includes, but is not limited to:

Before Installation

- Completed, signed application; including proposed location (in ground, above ground, within home)
- Proof of ownership of the property, (e.g., copy of recorded deed or current appraisal statement); and
- Copy of Flood Insurance Rate Map or statement from the local floodplain administrator assuring the property is not located in the floodplain; and <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search>

After Installation

- Copies of the signed and notarized Texas Division of Emergency Management Certificate of Installation and Inspection; and
 - Copies of contractor invoices, required building permits, inspections or certificates of occupancy; and
 - Copies of proof of payment for all costs claimed, such as copy of front and back of cancelled check or copy of bankcard statement showing debit/credit payment; and
 - Required latitude/longitude information for storm shelter in decimal degrees with **six (6) decimal places** which can be verified from the FEMA floodplain map
 - Copies of paperwork (to FEMA’s requirements) that shelter was designed and installed according to current FEMA design standards.
- Applicant must verify that all responses and documentation are true and valid by signing and dating the application and signed statement of voluntary participation.

- CCOEM’s process for awarding participation in the rebate program is **First Come – First Serve** until grant funds are depleted. There are no “waitlists” or reservations.
- Submit all required paperwork to the CCOEM organizational inbox at saferooms@co.cooke.tx.us

Cooke County Office of Emergency Management Residential Safe Room Rebate Program Procedures Step-by-Step Guide

PROGRAM PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANTS

Step 1

You should determine if the residence in which the safe room/storm shelter would be installed lies within a FEMA or locally-mapped floodplain.

FEMA prohibits the use of these rebate dollars to support the cost of installing safe rooms or storm shelters in residences that lie inside a “floodplain”. For the purpose of this requirement, homes built within a FEMA designated Special Flood Hazard Area (or Zone) are considered to be in the “floodplain” and ineligible for rebate. A local floodplain manager can help verify whether or not a property is in a floodplain.

There are a several ways this determination can be made. Rebate applicants can:

- Contact their local city or county floodplain administrator to determine if their property is in a Special Flood Hazard Area;
- Consult FEMA’s website at: <https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search>, and enter your address in the search box. Click on the “View Map” option to view your FIRM. Then click on “Make a FIRMette” on the left; or
- Contact CCOEM program staff for assistance in making that determination.

Step 2:

On the Rebate Application form, *you’ll certify, by signature, that you are the owner of the residence in which the unit is to be installed.* Please note this information will be confirmed. Owner, for the purposes of this program is the legal owner on a recorded deed of the home and its fixed property – that is, owner of both land and buildings.

On the Rebate Application form, you will indicate the year that your home was originally built. *Any home that is more than 45 years old will need to be evaluated by Texas Historical Commission (THC) prior to installation of a storm shelter.* Storm shelters installed prior to THC approval are not eligible for rebate. CCOEM staff will obtain this approval for you, if it is necessary.

The original signed or electronically signed application must be submitted; this will serve as your certification that the information contained in the application is true.

Step 3: *Wait for Rebate Award Letter from CCOEM.*

If your application is selected for rebate, you will receive a letter of notification from the CCOEM authorizing you to proceed with the unit installation. This program is not retroactive. Shelters begun prior to notification of rebate award by CCOEM are not eligible for rebate.

Step 4: *Identify the contractor who will provide and install the unit.*

Safe rooms/storm shelters come in a variety of shapes and sizes, above ground, others lie below ground. However, for the purpose of this program and because it is a FEMA requirement, any unit on which a rebate is paid under this program must be built to FEMA design standards. Current FEMA guidance requires installers comply with the below publications:

- FEMA P-320, Fourth Edition (Taking Shelter from the Storm)
- FEMA P-361, Third Edition (Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes)
- ICC 500-2014

Residents are encouraged to contact several different contractors to determine which unit will best suit their needs. Paperwork providing proof of compliance with FEMA design standards will be required.

Step 5: *Complete the installation of the unit and submit your documentation per the instructions provided in the CCOEM letter of notification you have received (if awarded) authorizing you to proceed with the unit installation.*

To enable the CCOEM to process the rebate, you will need to submit the following documents once the unit has been installed:

- A signed statement from you that your participation in this program has been strictly voluntary (this is included in your application);
- The notarized TDEM Certificate of Compliance;
- Copies of all invoices for the unit and its installation;
- Proof of payment for all costs claimed, such as copy of front and back of cancelled check or copy of bankcard statement showing debit/credit payment; and
- Other paperwork as requested from the CCOEM Program office.

Step 6: *Inspection.*

After submission of all required documentation in Step 7 to the CCOEM Program Office, schedule an inspection of your safe room by CCOEM staff. FEMA requires the GPS coordinate positioning of each home receiving a unit under this program be recorded. Therefore, as a step in the rebate payment process, CCOEM staff will make a visit to each unit site, verify the existence of the unit, record the longitude/latitude coordinates of the unit that has been installed and take photographs of the installed unit.

Step 7: Rebate Payment to You

Rebate payment to you - Please keep in mind that, in our experience, it sometimes takes months for the State of Texas to send us the rebate funds to pay to you. Please budget accordingly.

Cooke County OEM Residential Safe Room/Storm Shelter Rebate Program

Frequently Asked Questions

1.1 Q. **What is the Cooke County Residential Safe Room/Storm Shelter Rebate Program?**

Answer: A federally funded program which provides a partial rebate for purchase and installation of storm shelters for residential property owners within Cooke County.

1.2 Q. **What does the program offer?**

Answer: The program offers a rebate of 50% of installation costs and fees up to \$3,000 to homeowners who construct a storm shelter in or around their home that meets current FEMA standards.

1.3 Q. **Where does the rebate money come from? How is the rebate program funded?**

Answer: The rebate program is funded through a grant provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) to Cooke County, Texas.

Storm Shelters

2.1 Q. **What is a storm shelter?**

Answer: A storm shelter is a designed and engineered location which provides "near-absolute protection" from extreme wind events such as tornados pursuant to criteria issued by FEMA.

2.2 Q. **Am I 100% safe from a tornado while in a storm shelter?**

Answer: To date, a wind event exceeding the maximum design criteria in the FEMA guidance has not been observed; however, such an event may have occurred in the past or may potentially occur in the future. For this reason, the protection provided by storm shelters is called "near-absolute" rather than "absolute". Source: FEMA-361, "Design and Construction Guidance for Community Safe Rooms"; p. 1-2.

2.3 Q. **What is the difference between a storm shelter, a safe room, and a place of refuge?**

Answer: For purposes of this program the terms "storm shelter" and "safe room" are interchangeable and refer to an engineered structure that meets FEMA criteria and provides near absolute protection from wind events. A place of refuge, however, is a location that is a place of last resort and provides only limited protection from the effects of an extreme wind event.

2.4 Q. Which is better, an above or below ground storm shelter?

Answer: That depends on your particular preference and the characteristics of your property. Both were found to perform well in testing of wind related events.

2.5 Q. What kind of a storm shelter can I build? Above ground? Below ground? In my garage?

Answer: Any type of storm shelter may be constructed, so long as it is built to the FEMA P-320, Fourth Edition (Taking Shelter from the Storm), FEMA P-361, Third Edition (Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes), and ICC 500-2014 design standards and, if applicable, properly permitted by your city or town.

Program Eligibility, Registration and Selection

3.1 Q. Who is eligible for the program?

Answer: Homeowners with a residential home that meets these requirements:

- Home is in Cooke County, Texas
- Home is **not** in a FEMA mapped floodplain (see pg 4 on instructions to check this)
- Home older than 45 years approved by Texas Historical Commission prior to installation
- Owner must own the home at the time of rebate award
- Owner must own the home or be an individual who leases it for residential use
- Installations are limited to ground floor of multi-family units such as duplexes.

3.2 Q. Who are NOT eligible for the program?

Answer:

- Renters
- Apartment complexes and other multi-family residences above the ground level
- Business and commercial properties
- Any residence outside of Cooke County, Texas
- Any resident of Cooke County who has constructed a shelter or safe room outside of the approved construction Period of Performance (see pg 3).

3.3 Q. Does submission of an application guarantee that I will receive a rebate?

Answer: **No.** The application ensures you will be considered for the program, but does not guarantee that you will receive a rebate.

3.4 Q. What if you run out of funds before I get a notice of award?

Answer: Eligible applicants will be placed on a waiting list and will be contacted in the event additional grant funds are received by CCOEM.

3.5 Q. What payment methods are preferred for proof of payment?

Answer: Proof of payment by personal check (copy of front and back) is strongly recommended. Credit/debit cards will require a copy of applicable bank statement and cash payment will require a statement from the installer verifying payment with a \$0 balance.

3.6 Q. Does anyone receive priority in the program?

Answer: No priority is given outside of the eligibility requirements of the program.

3.7 Q: How do I find the information to complete "Property Location-Legal Description" on the application form?

Answer: You should be able to get this information from your deed or from the Cooke County Appraisal District. The District is a separate and independent entity from Cooke County. Their website is CookeCAD.org. At the top of the page is a Property Search button that you can find some of this information in. We've found the easiest way is to just type your last name in the search box and press enter.

3.8 Q How do I find the latitude and longitude of the place I'm having my safe room/storm shelter built?

Answer: Here are steps found via Google.

~On a Computer:

Open Google Maps in your browser.

Right-click the exact location or area on the map.

A pop-up menu will appear.

The top item on the menu displays the latitude and longitude.

~On a Mobile Device (iOS & Android):

Open the Google Maps app and find your desired location on the map.

Tap and hold the spot until a red pin drops.

Android: The coordinates will automatically appear in the search bar at the top.

iPhone: Tap the dropped pin or swipe up on the location details at the bottom of the screen to reveal the coordinates.

Using My Storm Shelter

4.1 Q. Is the storm shelter registry shared with the public?

4.2 Answer: No, we do not publish the storm shelter registry.

4.1 Q. Am I required to open my storm shelter to the public?

Answer: No. This is your shelter on your private property. You will decide who you allow into it just as you do for the rest of your home.

4.2 Q. What maintenance do I need to do to my storm shelter?

Answer: In general, keep it clean and inspect it once in a while for proper operation of the door and vents, moisture, rust, etc. Ask your contractor/vendor for maintenance requirements and additional information for your specific model and installation.

4.3 Q. What should I do or take into the storm shelter with me when weather is threatening?

4.4 Answer: A short list might include:

- A flashlight
- Your mobile telephone, a weather radio and a commercial broadcast (AM/FM) radio (but keep in mind that reception may be poor due to the location and/or materials in the storm shelter)

- Wear boots or other thick-soled shoes – when you leave the storm shelter, there may be hazards from storm debris
- Water and snacks
- Essential medicines
- A bucket, roll of trash bags and toilet paper to use if needed
- Towels
- a change of clothing appropriate for the season
- Blankets, pillows
- Jack, come-along and chain, or other items that might assist in opening a damaged door.

It is recommended to keep much of this and other items in an "emergency bag" or "go kit". Information and a full checklist of items may be found at www.ready.gov.