



MISSISSIPPI EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
NEWS RELEASE
CONTACT: 866- 920-MEMA

Media Contact
866-920-MEMA (6362)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

10:15 a.m. June 16, 2011

**MEMA SAFE ROOM PROGRAM:
Don't Begin Construction without MEMA Authorization**

CLINTON, Miss.—More than 3,700 residents in storm and tornado impacted counties have applied to the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency's "A Safe Place to Go" safe room reimbursement program since it opened June 2. MEMA would like to remind applicants that they must receive written authorization from MEMA before beginning construction of their safe room in order to qualify for reimbursement.

The MEMA safe room reimbursement program provides homeowners with grant funds to install a safe room. Through the program, the state can reimburse up to 75 percent of eligible costs not to exceed \$4,000 for the construction of a single-family safe room. The grant is made available through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds that are administered by MEMA.

Safe rooms must be installed by a licensed Mississippi contractor and must be built in accordance with FEMA's design plans and construction criteria. Details are available at www.fema.gov.

"It is important for applicants to the safe room program to remember that they cannot begin construction of their safe room until they receive written authorization from MEMA," said MEMA Director Mike Womack. "Some contractors may encourage homeowners to begin construction prior to completing the application and acceptance process, but homeowners who begin construction without MEMA authorization will not be eligible for reimbursement."

Homeowners have until July 31 to apply to the program and can apply online by visiting www.msema.org and clicking the "safe rooms" link. Free Internet access is available at most public libraries. Registering for FEMA disaster assistance does not also register a homeowner for the safe room reimbursement program. Homeowners must apply separately with MEMA.

After a homeowner applies to the program, MEMA will review the application. The review process takes about 60 days. If the application is approved, MEMA will send the homeowner an offer letter. Homeowners must confirm their intent to participate in the program by signing the letter and returning it to MEMA. Homeowners have two weeks from the date MEMA wrote the letter to sign and return it.

When MEMA receives the signed letter, they will provide the homeowner written authorization to begin construction of their safe room. Homeowners who begin construction without MEMA authorization may be disqualified from the reimbursement program.

Homeowners have six months to complete their storm shelter after receiving construction authorization from MEMA.

-more-

"Disaster Preparedness Saves Lives and Property"
Visit us online at www.msema.org

Safe rooms may be built into a home's existing structure, such as an interior bathroom or closet; constructed freestanding and anchored above ground in a garage or outdoors; or placed below ground.

Residents affected by tornadoes and severe storms that struck the following counties between April 15 and April 28 may apply for the reimbursement program: Alcorn, Attala, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Clarke, Clay, Coahoma, DeSoto, Greene, Grenada, Hinds, Holmes, Jasper, Kemper, Lafayette, Leflore, Marshall, Monroe, Montgomery, Neshoba, Newton, Panola, Quitman, Smith, Sunflower, Tishomingo, Tunica, Webster and Winston. Priority to participate and receive funding will be given to those whose homes were damaged or destroyed.

Mississippi originally launched the safe room program in 2001 after a series of tornadoes and severe weather killed eight people and injured more than 100 others.

Since 2001, more than 6,200 Mississippians have been able to install a storm shelter or safe room in their homes thanks to the "A Safe Place to Go Program."

###

Visit MEMA online at www.msema.org. You can also follow us on Twitter and Facebook using the keyword MSEMA.