



WHITE PAPER

X1 Can Improve Access to FEMA Safe Rooms

Many communities rely on storm shelters or safe rooms to protect citizens during tornados or hurricanes. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides grants to assist with safe room construction, as long as the construction meets certain standards and criteria. The publication FEMA P-361, *Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes: Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms*, outlines these requirements.

Community safe rooms and storm shelters are necessities in areas at risk of tornado and hurricane damage. Citizens need an available, secure location to wait out the storm and depend on storm shelters to be accessible and convenient.

Terminology

“**Storm shelters**” meet the requirements in the ICC 500 standard

“**Safe rooms**” meet the requirements in the ICC 500 standard and the more stringent FEMA Funding Criteria for near-absolute protection in this publication. All FEMA safe room criteria meet or exceed the storm shelter requirements of ICC 500.

[FEMA Safe Room Resources](#)

Safe rooms are locked when they are not in use. When a weather warning is issued, the shelters are unlocked by authorized personnel. However, there is the risk that personnel with keys will be unable to get to the location in the midst of a weather emergency, leaving people waiting outside the safe room exposed as the storm approaches—the exact opposite of what they went seeking.

This happened in Ozark, Missouri in April 2024. Under a last-minute tornado warning, the community safe room hadn't been unlocked and citizens were waiting outside. The Ozark Police Department usually sends someone to unlock the door, but in the inclement weather, they were busy responding to an emergency.

The delay led Ozark officials to evaluate their procedures and seek a new solution that would offer more security and more flexibility for accessing their community safe room during emergencies. By July 31, 2024, Ozark officials announced that upgrades to the safe room had been completed, which included the ability to remotely unlock doors.

FEMA safe room doors can be unlocked in a number of ways, including:

- **Remote access**
Some FEMA shelters use a cellular app to allow authorized personnel to unlock doors from anywhere. This system can provide a faster response time during severe weather.
- **Tornado watch**
Some schools open their FEMA safe rooms when the National Weather Service issues a tornado watch.
- **Severe weather**
Some schools open their FEMA safe rooms when a tornado touches down nearby.
- **Office of Emergency Management**
Some FEMA storm safe rooms are opened when the Office of Emergency Management deems it necessary.

FEMA P-361 states that safe room egress doors should be operable from the inside without the use of keys or special knowledge.

Being able to lock and unlock the safe room remotely is a vital time-saving feature. The cellular-based X1 Series access solution can be managed remotely through the Virtual Keypad app or browser. It's ideal for FEMA safe rooms, when response time matters most. X1 also has a variety of communication options that make it easy to install almost anywhere.

“With X1, you have the flexibility of configuring how it connects to the cloud

based off the best method for that location,” said Jon Adams, vice president of sales at DMP. “If you’re going into a situation where there isn’t an ideal network environment,

With its convenience and versatility, the X1 Series offers a perfect access control solution for FEMA safe rooms.

you can use cell only. Any door that has power can be an access control door now. If you have power and you have a door, you have everything you need to have an access control door.”

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Sources:

[“Tornado safe room procedure examined in Ozark after late April storm”](#)

[“Addressing siren & shelter concerns after Sunday’s storms”](#)

[“FEMA Shelter Upgrades Enhance Accessibility and Security”](#)

“Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes: Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms” *FEMA P-361, Fourth Edition, FEMA, April 2021*

