

Muldraugh gaining state's largest storm shelter

Facility will hold up to 1,000 people

By Marty Finley

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Kentucky's largest storm shelter is under construction in Muldraugh and its designer said the building has the capability to withstand 350 mph winds.



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The largest storm shelter in Kentucky is under construction in Muldraugh. The 6,150-square-foot facility will be able to house 1,000 people. Construction is expected to be complete by late July.

"I can't imagine what type of force it would take to remove it from the ground," said Jill Lewis Smith, president of Civic Consultants Inc. of Louisville.

To put it in perspective, Smith said the winds emanating from the massive tornado that ravaged Moore, Okla., last week did not exceed 250 miles per hour.

"It will be here when nothing else is," she said of the shelter.

The 6,150-square-foot building is solid reinforced concrete with a foundation supported by walls and a roof of insulated concrete, Smith said. The technology incorporated into the building materials was used in the state's first net zero school in Bowling Green and has been tested in laboratories, she said.

Seventy-five percent of the cost will be covered by a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant, Smith said. The remaining 25 percent has been split between the state at 12 percent and the city of Muldraugh at 13 percent. Construction of the building will meet or exceed \$1 million at \$170 per square foot on top of associated costs, such as professional services and land, she said.

Situated on Main Street in the heart of Muldraugh, the shelter can house up to 1,000 people. Residents who live nearby will be able to walk or run to its confines if severe weather breaks out, Smith said.

The contractor, Missouri-based Rick Shipman Construction, has until October to finish the work but expects to conclude construction by late July, she said. Rainy weather has caused some delays but crews should still meet its schedule, Smith added.

Once open, the facility, referred to as a "safe room" by FEMA, will not be limited to emergency situations, Smith said. It has been designed explicitly for multiple functions and will have a layout and amenities suitable for use as a community center, where weddings, fish fries and chicken dinners can be held.

"If storm sirens go off, you'll have 500 new guests," she said.

Restrooms and showers also are being installed.

FEMA will allow Muldraugh to keep any money it accumulates from renting the shelter to invest back into building needs. Smith said this detail is crucial because smaller shelters are often built without anyone to manage upkeep.

"Essentially, this building will pay for its own maintenance," she said.

Smith said the shelter could have come in handy after several cars of a Paducah-and-Louisville Railway train derailed in southwest Jefferson County in November near the Ohio Valley Dragway on U.S. 31W. During cleanup, a chemical fire sparked, forcing the evacuation of West Point. The American Red Cross set up a temporary emergency shelter at Muldraugh Elementary School.

Smith said FEMA also is building shelters "10 times this size" in coastal areas of the country.

Muldraugh Mayor Joseph Noon said the shelter is both sturdy and large enough to support the needs of the city should treacherous weather strike.

"It's a heck of a building," Noon said.