



Cooke County Residential Safe Room Rebate Handbook for Vendors & Installers 2026

The purpose of this handbook is to provide prospective storm shelter/safe room installers and vendors with a comprehensive guide to what is required of them in terms of certification for the purposes of this Rebate Program. These requirements have been changed from previous programs and are imperative for citizens to be eligible for their rebates. If these requirements are not met to the standards of FEMA and TDEM, citizens are not only at risk of losing their eligibility for a rebate, but it could also result in improperly installed shelters that cause injury or death in the event of severe weather.

Lives depend on these shelters being properly installed and it is the duty of the installer or manufacturer to ensure they provide all required proof to their clients that they are indeed qualified to perform this work.

What are the Standards?

For the purposes of this program, the standards for storm shelters, safe rooms, and their proper installation can be found in three publicly available documents:

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

These are the source documents for all vendors that govern the manufacture and installation of storm shelters and safe rooms that **MUST** be adhered to and proven with documentation. **These standards are non-negotiable.**

What Installer Documentation is Required?

All installers must provide one of the following forms of proof to their prospective clients prior to the submission of their Rebate Application in order to be eligible for this program:

- A [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) Unique Entity ID (UEID) that the client can verify that you are not in any active debarment status (the current preferred method by FEMA and TDEM). Even something as simple as a screenshot of a “No results found” from a debarment status search with your company name from SAM.gov will suffice for this program.
- A current certification ID number from any official storm shelter certification provider such as the [National Storm Shelter Association \(NSSA\)](https://www.nssa.org) or the [American Tornado Shelter Association \(ATSA\)](https://www.atasa.org)
- Any current and documented proof that shows you adhere to the standards set forth by the above source materials (all of them). This could include written confirmation of previous FEMA or TDEM approved projects certified by those agencies or a screenshot of your business listed in the database of an official storm shelter certification entity.

This documentation must be provided to your prospective client before they finish their Rebate Application as they are required to submit it as an attachment.

What does NOT constitute proof within this program:

- Your word
- Expired credentials
- Previous work outside of any rebate program
- Personal connections to the client or local government officials

Please bear in mind that all shelters installed under this program will be inspected upon completion by County officials to ensure they were done properly. If they do not pass this inspection, the citizen could lose their eligibility for a rebate.

What Manufacturer Certification is Required?

As a manufacturer of prefabricated shelters or safe rooms, please see the below guidance from the TDEM Region 2 Mitigation Office:

“A label is not required on a storm shelter for grant compliance, but it is what is usually seen. Many manufacturers are members of the American Tornado Shelter Association and accredited through them and provide ATSA labeling. Some products have their own UL rating and serial number tags separately or included with the ATSA labeling. ***What is required for grant compliance is that the manufacture and installer provide proof that the product and installation will meet ICC 500, P-320, and P-361***”

guidance. This can include the manufacturer engineered drawings, wind rating tests, etc. If they don't have labeling, we have accepted this type of documentation to prove the product meets compliance standards to be eligible for the rebate program. **This is ultimately up to the homeowners to ensure they meet the eligibility requirements.**"

So, to summarize – official certification labels or stickers are usually the preferred method, but so long as the manufacturer can provide documented proof that their shelters and safe rooms meet the established requirements, then that is accepted as well. Citizens must be provided with this documentation prior to application and installation as it will be required of them upon completion of their project and inspected.

How to Acquire Official Certification

If you are a storm shelter/safe room vendor or installer that is new to this program and would like to acquire official certification credentials in order to participate, there are a couple ways you can do this:

- Register for a Unique Entity ID at [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov). This can be an involved process, however, it is a surefire way to verify your compliance with Federally funded projects. Registration is free, but the process can be extensive.
- Register with any official storm shelter certification entity like the [NSSA](#) or the [ATSA](#). This may involve registration fees that recur annually.

Unfortunately, there are simply not many alternative methods of obtaining these official certifications. Just remember that if you are unable to provide documented proof that your products or your installation are in accordance with the above sources, your clients may lose their eligibility for this program and bear the full cost themselves.

What About Recommended Vendor Lists?

Due to ethical concerns and past issues involving problematic (or nonexistent) certification status, Cooke County will not be publishing any lists of recommended vendors to citizens. It is on the citizens to ensure that their providers and products are properly certified. You, as the providers, must ensure they are provided all the proper and current proof they will need to meet their requirements for participation in this program. A simple way for citizens to look for certified vendors would be to browse the vendor databases of either the NSSA, ATSA, or other official storm shelter certification entities found on their websites.

What Documentation is Required of Clients Prior to the Project?

For this program, clients will be required to provide the following documentation in their applications:

- Documentation that their shelter site is NOT in a FEMA mapped floodplain. A screenshot or printout of the FIRMette map will suffice.
- A copy of their deed or mortgage with their name matching that of their application name.
- Documentation that their preferred vendor or installer is a certified shelter provider/installer.
- A detailed plan that provides the type of shelter they intend to install, the specs of the shelter, and the *exact location*they intend to install it. You, as the installer, should be able to provide them with this information. A floor plan or site plan of their home or property with the location of the desired shelter is preferred.
- (For homes 45yrs old or older only) Documentation that they are either cleared by the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) or do not require their clearance. Please refer to the “Requirements for State Historical Preservation” document on the Rebate Program Webpage to determine if they need SHPO clearance (most homes will not).

If any of this documentation is missing, the clients will not be approved and it will only prolong their process. Your involvement as their vendor is crucial to providing some of this information for them.

What Documentation is Required of Clients After Project Completion?

The following documentation will be required of your clients upon project completion:

- A signed statement from the client that their participation in this program has been strictly voluntary (this is included in their application)
- The notarized TDEM Certificate of Compliance (you are responsible for providing this to them and can be downloaded from the [Rebate Program webpage](#))
- Copies of all invoices for the unit and its installation
- Proof of payment to you for all costs claimed, such as copy of front and back of cancelled check or copy of bankcard statement showing debit/credit payment (copy of checks are preferred – you provide them with these. Cashiers checks also require additional documentation and can incur additional scrutiny).
- Other paperwork as requested from the CCOEM Program office
- Their completed Individual Rebate Checklist (found among the materials for download on the Rebate Program webpage).

Once these have been provided to the Cooke County Office of Emergency Management, the client will schedule an inspection of the completed storm shelter or safe room with the County EMC to confirm everything contained in the notarized Certificate of Compliance. Once this is complete, the client’s package will be submitted to the County Auditor’s Office for payment of the rebate.

Common Pitfalls

Some common pitfalls of this program include:

- Names of clients not matching on their applications, proofs of ownership, or method of payment. Please encourage clients to ensure the same name is used on all three of these.
- Payments in cash or cashiers check. Cash/cashier check payments are allowed, but you must then provide your clients with a signed statement that includes the total amount, the date you were paid, and an invoice showing a zero balance. It puts more work on your end and it is strongly encouraged that clients pay you by check so that endorsed copies can be submitted. Debit/credit card payments must be accompanied by the client's bank or credit provider statement that shows the payment in question. Again, check is the easiest method to document.
- Starting installation work prior to clients receiving their award letter. If any work is begun (other than initial planning and estimates) prior to a client receiving their award letter for the program, then their eligibility is voided. Please ensure clients understand this as you work with them during their application phase.
- Going past the Period of Performance End Date. This program has an established end date of **18 February 2027**. Any project not completed by this date will be ineligible for reimbursement. We strongly recommend timeframes of 90-120 days to complete these projects – this is not a requirement, just a recommended best practice. Please ensure your clients understand this and plan accordingly.

At the end of the day, the client is ultimately responsible for ensuring that their shelter or safe room is in compliance with all the requirements of this program. Therefore, it is imperative upon you, as vendors and installers, to assist in providing them what will need from you to ensure compliance. Your assistance to them will be critical in meeting their various requirements. This handbook should provide you with a clearer understanding of how best to go about that.

Points of Contact

Should you require additional information not covered here, please reach out to the Cooke County Office of Emergency Management at 940-668-5400 or email your questions to saferooms@co.cooke.tx.us.