

Gus Working with Governor's Office on Hurricane Shelter Exception

Gus, who serves on the House Homeland Security Committee has reached out to Governor Crist's office to offer any appropriate assistance he may provide to help in getting an exception to FEMA guidelines for hurricane shelters in Florida. Without a waiver from FEMA, the state will be strapped for cash to make the necessary tornado-proofing upgrades, therefore risking the completion and even building of new or planned shelters.

Full coverage on this issue from The Tampa Tribune...

Florida officials are urging top federal emergency managers to give the state a break on tougher national standards that would require hurricane shelters to be tornado-proof.

Florida's U.S. senators and House members also are being asked to exert their influence on the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"Florida historically has never had a need to shelter for the winds associated with a tornado," said John Cherry, a spokesman with the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

The added costs of meeting the new FEMA guidelines, state officials say, already threaten the current construction or planning of at least seven hurricane shelters in six Florida counties - including one in Hillsborough County and two in Pasco County - as hurricane season approaches.

The Brandon Community Advantage Center in Hillsborough County was to house one of the planned emergency evacuation shelters, with ground scheduled to be broken in May or June.

Florida to FEMA: American Red Cross Standards Good Enough

More from The Tribune...

Until now, the state has been using American Red Cross guidelines for hurricane shelters, which require buildings to at the minimum withstand wind speeds reaching between 100 mph and 150 mph.

To help make their case for a state waiver from the new FEMA guidelines, the state Division of Emergency Management has put together a "white paper" laying out why enforcement of the new design rules "could seriously endanger the ability of the state to reduce its public hurricane shelter deficit."

Those arguments were laid out this week in a face-to-face meeting between the division's director, W. Craig Fugate, and FEMA Director David Paulison, himself from South Florida.

"We're looking for either a waiver or a middle ground on the specification," said Cherry, who described the discussions with Paulison as "positive and ongoing toward a resolution to this issue."