

Gus Gets Good News from FEMA on Shelter Waiver for Florida

Florida is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on the agency's design and construction standards for community shelters. The state believes that FEMA's 361 standard for shelter construction is too rigorous for the force of winds that hurricane shelters in Florida generally encounter.

The Issue

The FEMA 361 standard would require these shelters to be built to withstand the strongest of tornado winds, which almost never occur in Florida. Complying with these standards would mean that Florida would have to spend about twice as much money as it currently does to build new shelters to these specifications at a projected additional cost of more than \$2 million dollars.

Over the past few months, Craig Fugate, Florida's director of Emergency Management, has been working with FEMA Administrator David Paulison to obtain an exemption or waiver for Florida from these standards.

FEMA has agreed to allow Florida to retrofit existing shelters to a different and less costly standard, referred to as the International Code Council (ICC) standard, which it is expected the agency eventually will be requiring all shelters to adhere to within the next four or five months.

Until recently, FEMA has been reluctant to allow Florida to build six new shelters to this less costly standard, even though it is expected the agency will adopt the ICC standard for all shelters in the near future.

FEMA Director Tells Bilirakis Waiver to be Granted

Congressman Bilirakis, who sits on the Homeland Security Committee that oversees FEMA, spoke with Director Paulison on Friday and received assurances that his Agency was prepared to make an exception.

Today, the Tampa Tribune reported the good news...

Bilirakis of Palm Harbor says he received word in a telephone conversation Friday with FEMA Director R. David Paulison.

He and Brown-Waite are members of the House Committee on Homeland Security, which oversees FEMA.

"Director Paulison was clear that he understood the issue and was going to support the waiver. At a time when budget constraints are very tight, this waiver will save Florida a lot of money," Bilirakis said Monday.

"Most importantly, this decision will clear a hurdle for these shelters to be built without further delay." [Read more...](#)