

City of Madison

Building Department Newsletter

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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BUILDING PERMITS REQUIRED FOR SAFE ROOMS AND STORM SHELTERS

There has been an increased interest in construction of safe rooms and storm shelters since the tragic and devastating storms that hit our area. A safe room is an area constructed within a home or business, either below or above ground, which provides temporary shelter to the building occupants from the effects of a severe storm or tornado. As opposed to safe rooms, storm shelters are generally detached from the main residence or building and provide the same short term protection as safe rooms.

A grant from FEMA has recently been made available to homeowners who wish to apply for financial assistance with the construction of a safe room or storm shelter. Certain restrictions apply to qualify for the grant. Regardless of whether a homeowner qualifies for or takes advantage of the grant funding, there are certain things homeowners should know when planning to build a safe room or storm shelter.

The following information is provided to assist property owners who wish to build a safe room or storm shelter within the City of Madison:

- Safe rooms and storm shelters require a building permit from the Building Department before construction commences. Permit applications are available for download from the City of Madison website under the Building Department.
- Safe room and storm shelter construction plans must meet FEMA requirements published in FEMA P-320 "Taking Shelter from the Storm" and ICC 500-2008 "ICC/NSSA Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters".
- All construction plans must be sealed by an Alabama registered engineer.
- Safe rooms and storm shelters must be inspected by the Building Department during various phases of construction.

A third party engineer inspection report certifying that the safe room or storm shelter meets FEMA standards is required before a Certificate of Completion or Certificate of Occupancy (for newly constructed homes) can be issued.

DON'T START BUILDING BEFORE YOU OBTAIN A PERMIT

In April of 2011 the Madison City Council adopted Ordinance Number 2011-60, revising and amending Chapter 6 of the City Code of Ordinances pertaining to construction within the City and providing for the adoption of more recent editions of building codes. A significant change and amendment to Section R108.1 of the 2006 International Residential Code addresses the act of commencing construction without a building permit. This change states, ***"A permit shall not be valid until the fees prescribed by ordinance have been paid as required. Any person, contractor, firm or corporation who commences any work on a building, structure, electrical, gas, mechanical, or plumbing system before obtaining the necessary permits shall be subject to a fee equal to twice the calculated permit fee, such fee to be paid in addition to the required permit fee."*** Pouring of concrete, installation of plumbing drains and water supply piping and installation of electrical wiring are a few examples of when a double permit fee would apply without first obtaining a permit. In addition, no inspections can be scheduled or performed without a permit being issued first.

NEW LICENSING RULES FOR CONTRACTORS

Recent Alabama court cases and rulings have forced changes to licensing requirements affecting numerous construction trades such as roofers, siding, window installations and others. As a result of these rulings, certain trade contractors performing work on one or two family dwellings in which the cost of work exceeds \$10,000.00 AND does not affect the structural integrity of the residence are required to obtain a Limited License from the Alabama Homebuilder's Licensure Board. A copy of a signed contract may be required to show proof of the amount of work being performed before a permit can be issued by the Building Department. If a project involves more than one trade or affects the structural integrity of the residence, a Residential Homebuilders License is required without limitation.

FAQ'S

Q: Do I need a building permit for a storage shed to store my lawn mower, etc.?

A: You are only required to obtain and pay for a building permit if the floor area of the residential accessory structure, in this case the storage shed, is equal to or greater than 200 square feet. It doesn't matter if the storage building is constructed on-site or you purchased a prefabricated building from a building supply store.

Q: Is a permit required to construct a deck on my house?

A: Yes, regardless of size. In addition, construction plans must be submitted to the Building Department for review and approval. Thousands of injuries and deaths occur every year as a result of improperly constructed decks. Most of the deck failures are a due to poorly designed and undersized floor joists or girders and improper attachment of the deck to the house.

Q: Can I perform my own plumbing work or am I required to hire a licensed plumber?

A: You can perform your own plumbing work as homeowner. Depending upon the scope of work, a plumbing permit and certain inspections by the Building Department may be required. All plumbing work must be installed and tested to meet the requirements of the 2006 International Residential Code regardless if a permit is required. Some plumbing work such as replacement of sinks, toilets, tubs, etc. where no existing piping within walls or under floors will be replaced are exempt from a plumbing permit.

CODE QUESTION AND ANSWER OF THE QUARTER

Q: What design requirements does the 2006 International Residential Code have for the construction of retaining walls?

A: Section R404.1.3 requires concrete or masonry foundation or retaining walls to be designed in accordance with accepted engineering practice when either of the following conditions exists:

- 1. Walls are subject to hydrostatic pressure from groundwater.*
- 2. Walls supporting more than 48 inches of unbalanced fill that do not have permanent lateral support at the top or bottom.*

In addition, Section 6-19 of Chapter 6, City of Madison Code of Ordinances, requires that two sets of engineer stamped construction drawings be submitted for review and approval prior to a permit be issued for a retaining wall and that a certification be provided signed by a registered engineer that the retaining wall conforms to all design specifications.