



Building Inspection Department

DATE **March 7, 2012**

TO **Homeowners and Storm Shelter Contractors**

FROM Steve O'Neal, Chief Building Official

SUBJECT Building Permits- Storm Shelters

The Lubbock City Council recently adopted the 2009 International Residential Code, which includes a new reference standard known as ICC/NSSA-500 "Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters".

Interest in storm shelter construction has spiked locally, both because of the recent tragedies to the East of us and due to the FEMA/SPAG storm shelter reimbursement program, where the State will pay one-half of the cost of construction of approved storm shelters to a maximum of \$2,500. As a result, a number of questions have arisen regarding the shelters and procedures for obtaining permits.

Several types of storm shelters are available, those that are stand-alone "accessory" type buildings, and those that are built inside a "host" building. The latter category consists primarily of 3 types:

- 1) A room that has been constructed with strengthened walls, ceilings and doors;
- 2) A prefabricated structure that is assembled entirely within the host building and anchored to the floor; &
- 3) A prefabricated box or other structure that is designed to be installed below grade or partially below grade within the host building, sometimes in the garage of a dwelling, with a sliding or dogged hatch of some type and a "ship's ladder" or steps leading down into it.

Of these, the free-standing types that are designed to go outside and are not part of the "host" building are treated as any normal accessory building (such as a tool shed or workshop), and would therefore be exempt from permitting and inspection requirements if less than 200 sq. ft. in area. The exemption would also be honored for any such shelter that is installed entirely or partially below ground, yet entirely outside of the host building. All building codes, including the NSSA-500 Standard, must still be met.

Of those that are installed within a "host" building, building permits are required, regardless of size. If an excavation is necessary to install a storm shelter below grade, and the excavation will extend below the 45 degree bearing plane of any load-bearing wall footing, a structural engineer will need to evaluate the proposed installation to determine whether structural under-pinning of the footing is necessary.

Installing contractors must apply for and obtain building permits in accordance with standard City of Lubbock procedures and Section 107.1 of ICC/NSSA 500. Installing contractors must be registered with the City of Lubbock and be either bonded or insured. Contractors shall not require homeowners to obtain permits for them. To do so places both the home owner and the contractor in violation of the law.