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With You Since the Land Run of 1889

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Contractors busy building storm shelters for OU students, faculty



A construction worker uses a lift to raise 20-foot rods of rebar to the roof Wednesday, March 18, 2015, as a crew lays the steel reinforcing to complete a concrete storm shelter at OU Traditions Square West apartments in Norman.

Contractors are busy this month constructing above-ground, storm-hardened shelters for residents of OU's student housing facilities and apartment complexes.

Phase I of the project includes shelters at Traditions Square-East, Traditions Square-West and Kraettli Apartments. Project II will include a large shelter to be constructed in the area of Walker and Couch centers. The third project will include shelters that will be part of the construction of the two new residential colleges near Lindsey Street and Jenkins Avenue.

An OU spokesman said the contractor is working toward construction of the three facilities in Phase I to a "level suitable to be used as protective shelters" in April for Traditions Square West and Kraettli Apartments and in May for Traditions Square East.

OU Regents this past June selected MA Plus to design the storm shelters. When completed, the structures will provide shelter space for approximately 4,000 OU students.

The university is investing \$12 million funded by money OU receives under Section 13 of the state constitution to better protect students from tornadoes and severe storms.

"The safety of our students is our No. 1 priority," OU President David L. Boren said at the meeting in June.

In September 2013, at Boren's request, the OU Board of Regents approved the selection of MA Plus to help design a campus system of additional storm shelters. At that time, maps were distributed to students and posted in student housing indicating the locations of existing shelters to be used while additional space is being developed.

Boren introduced OU's Severe Weather Procedure for Particularly Dangerous Situation (PDS) days, which are issued by the NOAA Storm Prediction Center. These situations are generally declared far in advance of storm activity during a period when all the conditions appear to be coming together to warrant a high threat. In those situations, Boren may invoke an early closure of the Norman campus to allow people to gather their loved ones and proceed with personal safety plans.

For these particularly dangerous situation days where sufficient advance warning of impending weather is available, the university has designated best available refuge areas in locations that can be accessed using university IDs by students residing in university housing and faculty and staff who are on campus at the time.