

# Oklahoma's Safe Schools 101: Recruiting Assessment Teams for Determining Best Available Refuge Areas

P1.131

Andrea Dawn Melvin and Kevin A. Kloesel – Oklahoma Climatological Survey; The University of Oklahoma

Richard D. Smith – Norman WFO/NOAA/NWS; Norman, OK and Bill White – Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, Oklahoma City, OK

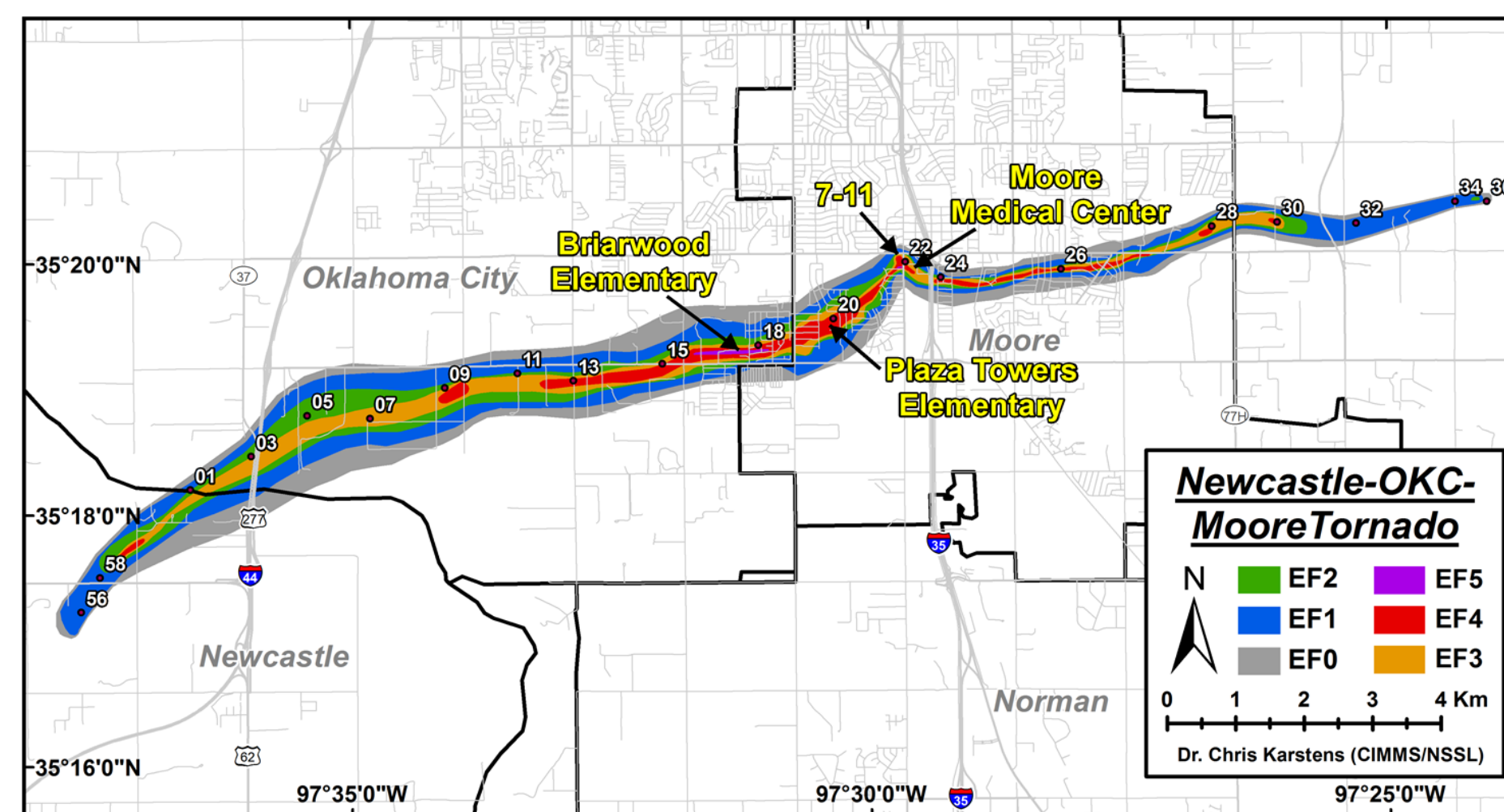
## Weather Ready Schools



Two schools destroyed by an EF5 tornado. Seven children died while taking shelter inside the school building.



Hallway where fatalities occurred at Plaza Towers Elementary on 20 May 2013. The hallway had been identified as a refuge area by school officials.



Public outcry demands all schools in Oklahoma have safe rooms.



Recruiting professionals to participate in Safe Schools 101 was organic. Once word spread about the training program, professionals from all fields wanted to be involved in finding a solution.



FEMA and OEM conducted training courses with volunteers from all the professional disciplines.



The course consisted of two (2) days of classroom instruction and one (1) day on-site at a school.

During the course participants learned about natural hazards that affect large venue safe rooms, characteristics of tornadoes and hurricanes, terminology of common building materials, differences between a shelter and a safe room, and how to complete the FEMA 361 refuge area checklist.

Participants were divided into assessment teams with diverse professional backgrounds.



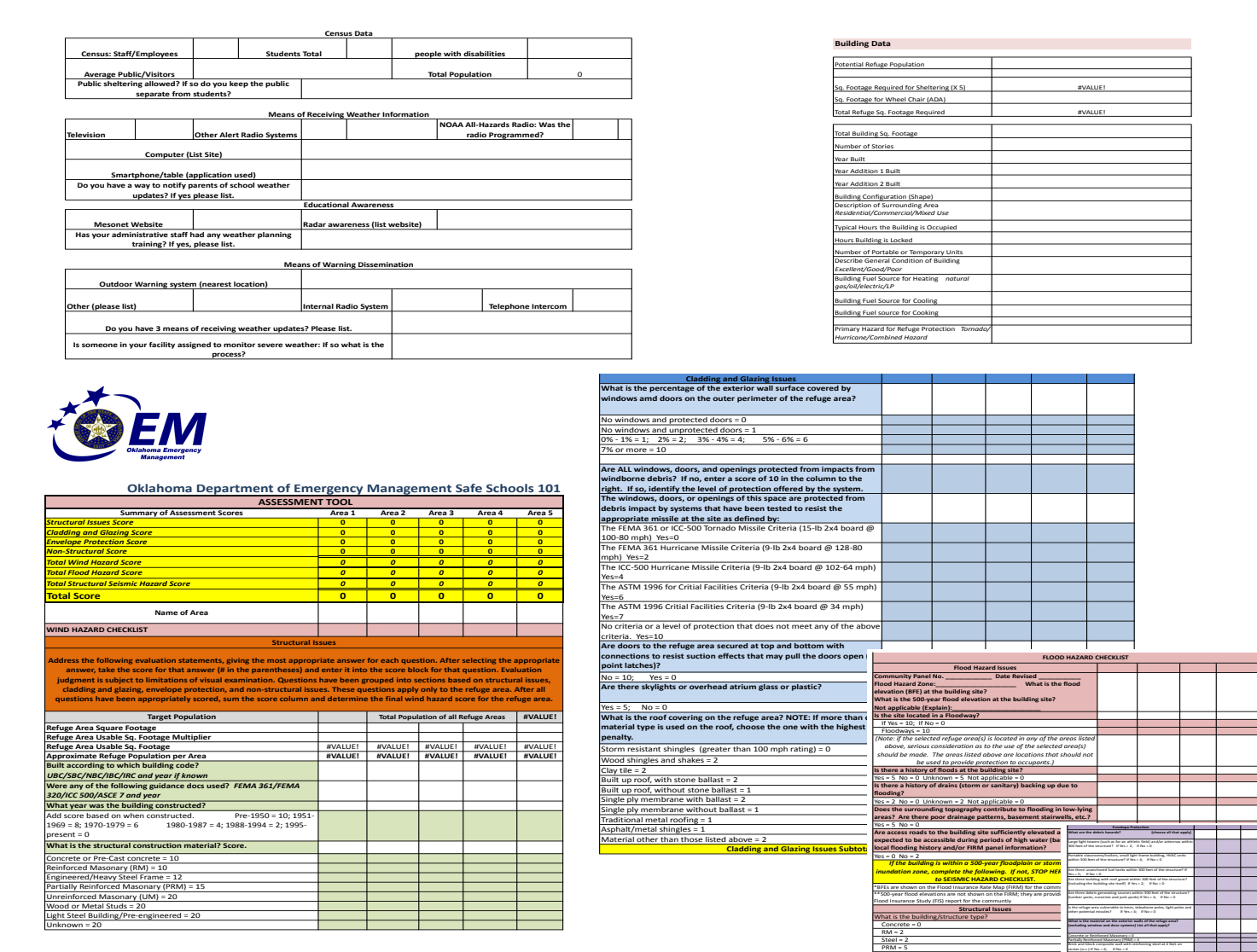
Teams spent half a day touring and evaluating a school site.



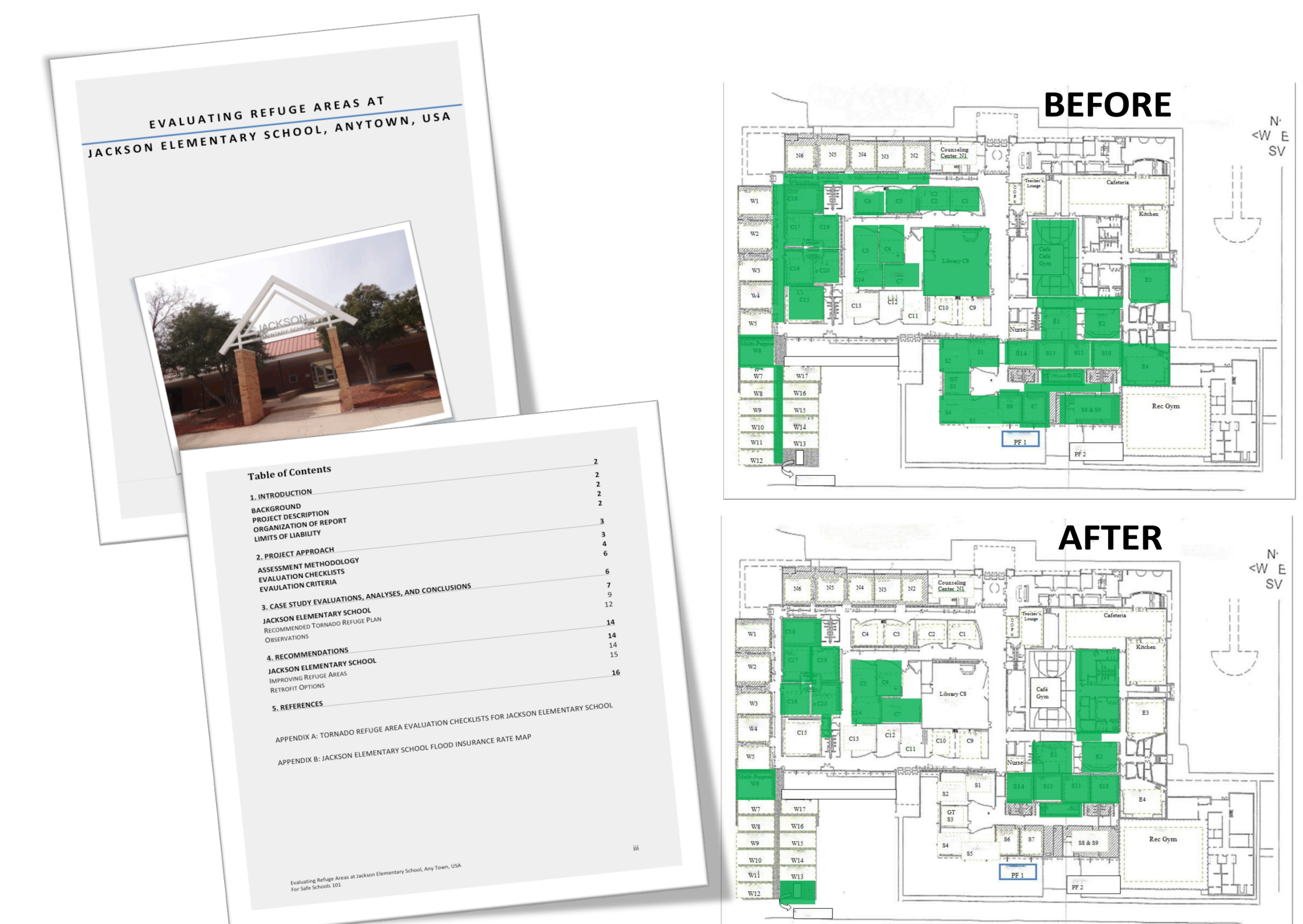
All teams reconvened to discuss what they encountered during their school tour.



Teams used the FEMA 361 Appendix B.1 Extreme Wind Refuge Area Evaluation Checklists to score and identify areas that were best suited to serve as refuge areas.



Each team modified their school's sheltering plan as needed and provided a detailed assessment report to OEM.



Sustaining the Safe Schools 101 program will be challenging.

All participants found the training valuable. However, many of the architects and engineers were concerned about including their names on reports. The assessment teams are comprised of volunteers. Liability for any opinions expressed in the reports discouraged some of the architects and engineers from participating fully. Legislation may need to be modified before architects and engineers feel protected enough to continue assessing schools.

The expertise of architects and engineers are critical to the success of this program. Without their participation, the assessments will not meet the needs of school administrators.

Additional FEMA regions are interested in duplicating the program.

OEM has the freedom to expand the program to all 518 Oklahoma school districts and their 1800 school buildings.

Corresponding author address:  
Andrea Dawn Melvin, Oklahoma Climatological Survey,  
University of Oklahoma, 120 David L. Boren Blvd.,  
Suite 2900, Norman, OK 73072;  
Email: andrea@mesonet.org