

The Strengthen Alabama Homes program at the Alabama Department of Insurance is pleased to provide for you responses to the frequently asked questions below. Please feel free to contact our program if you have a question not addressed below.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

- 1. What is the Strengthen Alabama Homes grant program?**
 - a. The Strengthen Alabama Homes grant program is designed to provide wind mitigation grants to homeowners in Baldwin and Mobile Counties in Alabama. Grant recipients must use these grants to make their home resistant to wind damage by retrofitting their home to the FORTIFIED™ standard.
 - b. The Strengthen Alabama Homes grant program's mission is to lower insurance rates in Alabama by mitigating as many homes as possible in Baldwin and Mobile County.

- 2. Where can I learn more about FORITFIED and the insurance discounts available?**
 - a. A non-profit organization based out of Mobile, Alabama, Smart Home America, has developed a website, www.DontGoof.org, to assist homeowners with understanding FORTIFIED, their roof and the discounts available. The site also provides valuable information on how to avoid fraud and shopping for insurance, as well as frequently asked questions and additional resources.

- 3. Do I have to pay the grant back if I qualify?**
 - a. No. Grants are not loans and do not need to be repaid. The purpose of this grant is to lower insurance rates in Alabama and make homes resilient to storm damage.
 - b. Only one grant per household.

- 4. Is there a tax benefit for receiving this grant in the year I receive it?**
 - a. The state of Alabama has an income tax credit of up to \$3,000 for mitigation work. The Alabama Department of Insurance does not provide tax advice.
 - i. 2012 Code of Alabama, Title 40 - REVENUE AND TAXATION. Chapter 18 - INCOME TAXES. Section 40-18-15.5 - Deductions for certain retrofitting or upgrades to homes - Residence in Alabama.

5. How is the grant program funded?

- a. Funding for the grants come from contributions by the insurance industry and other entities to this program. Although a state agency administers this program, funding does not come from Alabama's General Fund. Funds from this program are not tied to Federal programs such as FEMA. The Strengthen Alabama Homes program may add additional funding options and partnership funding as positive funding opportunities arise.

6. Am I required to live in my home for any length of time after receiving the Strengthen Alabama Homes grant?

- a. Possibly*. For the majority of applicants, the answer will be no - These are homeowners who receive funding only from the Strengthen Alabama homes grant program.
- b. *If a homeowner qualifies for additional funding from one of our partner agencies, such as the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) there will be additional requirements. Homeowners will be made aware of any obligation(s) they may have once we prepare your funding letter(s) and/or application(s).

7. Can't I just get a new roof from the grant?

- a. The grant program is designed to mitigate homes against wind damage. The only way to get a new roof is to meet the FORTIFIED Bronze level at a minimum.

8. What if I just want to replace my windows or doors, or maybe I want to get hurricane shutters for my home. Will the grant pay for those items?

- a. The goal of the grant program is to mitigate homes to the Bronze level first (roof system) and Silver level second (openings etc.). Doors and windows may be covered by the grant if there is enough funding to cover those retrofits after the Bronze level is met and only if door and window retrofits are required to achieve Silver.

9. Who qualifies for a grant?

- a. Residents of Baldwin and Mobile County that claim their primary residents in those counties may apply. (You cannot live in a condominium or mobile home.)

10. When will I receive my grant award notice ?

- a. You will receive your grant award notice at the same time you are asked to select a bid from a contractor to perform the mitigation work on your home. You will receive an email asking you to log in to your strengthen Alabama Homes program portal and view your award notice and bids provided for you. At this time you will

also be able to see a calculation of out-of-pocket money you will need to pay a contractor by bid, by FORTIFIED designation level.

11. If my primary residence is located in Baldwin or Mobile County and I want to apply for a grant, are there other requirements I have to meet to apply?

- a. Yes.
 - i. Your home must be in good repair.
 - ii. You must provide proof that you have an in-force homeowners insurance policy before the grant will be paid.
 - iii. You must have flood insurance if you are located in a special flood hazard area.
 - iv. You must get a home evaluation from a Certified FORTIFIED Evaluator that is approved by the Strengthen Alabama Homes program that you will have the opportunity to select after you fill out an application.
 - v. You must be able to provide proof that you have an in-force wind insurance policy on your home at the completion of the mitigation work. Payment will be issued for the contractor for mitigation work done on your home only after you satisfy all of the requirements for the grant.

12. What happens if I do not get insurance coverage on my home after it has been mitigated?

- a. Before work begins, you should get 3-5 insurance quotes, choose the policy with the best value and set a tentative effective date for coverage based on your contractor's work schedule. The Coastal Alabama Insurance Shopper's Guide at www.aciir.culverhouse.ua.edu/ShoppersGuide, has been created to help Alabama homeowners understand and shop their insurance.
- b. Contractors are paid by the grant program only after you provide proof of insurance to the Strengthen Alabama Homes program. If you are unable to get insurance, or refuse to, the cost of mitigation work is payable by the homeowner. Again, homeowners are liable for any unpaid costs.

13. What happens if I cannot afford to pay the cost difference between my grant award and the bids I receive?

- a. You may opt out of the grant program at any time **BEFORE** construction begins. The money you paid for the home review will not be reimbursed. In order to opt out of the grant program you must notify the Strengthen Alabama Homes program in writing within 30 days of receiving your award letter.

14. How long are the bids good for?

- a. Bids are good for 90 days from the day they are received.

15. How long is the evaluation good for?

- a. The evaluation is good for 5 years from the date of the report unless there have been improvements or damage to the home. Then, it's likely a new or updated report will need to be completed. Please consult your certified FORTIFIED Evaluator for guidance on evaluations.

16. How long do I have to secure additional funding?

- a. From the date your grant is awarded, you have 180 days to complete the mitigation work on your home. Time needed to secure additional money you pay out-of-pocket to the contractor is between you and the contractor. Please remember that the contractor will not be paid your award amount until a FORTIFIED designation is met. Please keep in mind that you have 180 days from the notice of award to complete your mitigation work.

17. How long will my application remain open after bids are received?

- a. Your application will stay open for 30 days once your award notice is sent to you. If we do not receive written response from you declining the grant or acceptance, the grant money allocated to your application will be given to another qualified applicant. We cannot hold grant money indefinitely in this program.

18. What FORTIFIED levels does the Strengthen Alabama Homes program grant cover?

- a. The Strengthen Alabama Homes program gives grants for homeowners to meet either the Bronze and/or Silver levels only. You must achieve a Bronze designation before working towards Silver.

19. What is IBHS?

- a. IBHS is the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety, a non-profit research and communications organization funded by the insurance industry. IBHS developed the FORTIFIED Standard adopted by the Strengthen Alabama Homes program.
- b. IBHS is solely dedicated to reducing property losses resulting from natural and man-made hazards. It identifies the vulnerabilities of homes and businesses and makes recommendations for improvements to the design, construction, retrofitting, repair, and rebuilding of residential and commercial structures across the U.S.

20. What is the FORTIFIED Standard?

- a. The FORTIFIED Standard is a program developed by IBHS that takes a scientifically proven systems based approach to strengthening homes against wind damage. There are 3 levels of the program; Bronze, Silver and Gold.

- i. **BRONZE:** The first level of FORTIFIED is the Bronze level which addresses the roof system of a house (including soffits and gable ends) with the primary goal of keeping water out.
- ii. **SILVER:** The Second level of the FORTIFIED Standard is the Silver level which addresses the Bronze requirements in addition to openings, attached structures such as porches or carports, and the bracing of gable ends.
- iii. **GOLD:** The third level of FORTIFIED is Gold, which requires a “Continuous Load Path” for the main structure of the home, pressure rated windows and doors, and requires chimneys to be well anchored into the roof structure. The grant program will not provide funds to meet the Gold certification level at this time.

21. What is a FORTIFIED Evaluator and why does the program require one?

- a. A FORTIFIED Evaluator is the only individual trained and certified by IBHS to gather important information on the construction details of your home that will determine whether it is able to be mitigated.
- b. FORTIFIED Evaluators inspect and gather details before, during and after the project is completed to verify that the contractor has done the work correctly and to help IBHS determine if the home meets FORTIFIED standards.
- c. Once IBHS verifies that the work performed meets the program requirements, only then will a FORTIFIED Designation certificate be issued.

22. Is there a charge for this evaluation?

- a. Yes. FORTIFIED Evaluators are independent contractors and set their own prices for their services. We recommend that you shop around to determine which evaluator will work best for you. You are responsible for fees associated with the evaluations.

23. Will all homes evaluated pass the evaluation?

- a. No. Some homes, due to the way they are constructed, will not pass the evaluation.

24. If my house is already at the Bronze level can I get a grant to reach the Silver level?

- a. Yes, so long as you did not receive a Strengthen Alabama Homes grant to meet the Bronze standard. You may only receive one grant from the Strengthen Alabama Homes program.

- 25. I do not have internet access but meet the requirements for a grant. Can I still apply?**
- Yes. However, the most immediate way for you to apply is through our online application. Please call our program office at 1-800-433-3966 and request a paper application packet. Fill out all information requested in the packet and return to us in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.
- 26. I tried to apply or upload documents for a grant and I received an error message. What do I do?**
- Contact the Strengthen Alabama Homes program by calling 1-800-433-3966, or by emailing the program at SAH@insurance.alabama.gov. Your issue will be forwarded to our software development team for troubleshooting.
- 27. How much will my grant award be?**
- The grant awards will cover the cost of mitigation up to \$10,000. There may be additional funding available beyond the \$10,000 amount through the partnership programs.
- 28. What qualifications or training are required for contractors approved to work with the Strengthen Alabama Homes program?**
- Contractors that work on the Strengthen Alabama Homes program receive professional training on the FORTIFIED Standard, must complete training specifically designed for the grant program and must be licensed and insured. All contractors will hold a valid home builders license issued by the State of Alabama.
- 29. Can I do the mitigation work to my home myself?**
- No. You must use a contractor authorized to work on the Strengthen Alabama Homes Program. Contractor selection is done as part of the application process and the contractor you select is responsible for all aspects of the mitigation work on your home.
- 30. Can I hire one of the contractors on your list to do the mitigation work before the grant is awarded?**
- Please do not work with a contractor to do mitigation work for you until you go through the application process. If you do so, and are denied or do not receive the award amount you expected, you will be liable for all costs above your award.
 - Grants are only paid if you follow, and complete, the Strengthen Alabama Homes grant process. A list of contractors and their contact information is available on our website here:
<https://strengthenalabamahomes.com/Home/Contractors>

31. Can the contractor I selected as part of the grant application do additional work on my home?

- a. Yes. However, a separate contract for any additional work outside of the scope of the FROTIFIED Bronze and/or Silver level certification will be required. This grant program will not pay for additional work on your home and you will only receive the grant amount stated on your award letter.

32. If my bid amounts are more than my grant award amount, who will pay the difference?

- a. Homeowners are responsible for the difference. The Strengthen Alabama Homes program will only pay the amount shown on the grant award letter.