

LOOK UPSTREAM

JULY 2003

Living safely in Harris County requires everyone to become knowledgeable of flood risks and where these risks are present. Do you or your homeowners association or MUD know which areas of your community previously never flooded have predictable risk of being flooded in the future? Do you know the extent? Do the folks at the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) know?

What is clearly known by the professionals is that it is a fact both existing and future subdivisions and other development throughout our neighborhoods will experience more encompassing and higher level floods outside the current flood hazard areas.

Urban development is the greatest cause of increases in flooding. This is an accepted fact recognized by the professionals who earn their living working to understand and solve stormwater flooding issues. The Tropical Storm Allison Recover Project known as "TSARP" which is currently recalculating the floodplains and flood risk areas throughout Harris County will provide us with maps late this summer showing if your street and/or home is in the floodplain. But this information does not tell us how much flood levels will rise and encroach upon our property as a result of on-going and future urban development. And this can happen to a significant extent as evidenced in the official master drainage

plan prepared for the Harris County Commissioners Court in 1984 which reports flood damage will increase as urban development increases such that when the watershed becomes fully developed flood volume will increase up to 500% of a base flood at that time if major flood mitigation measures are not constructed to control the release of water. Imagine in your mind the greatest flooding you can remember we have experienced in the last 40 or 50 years in the Cypress Creek areas, then imagine the volume of stormwater being 5 times greater than this.

We must **look upstream** wherever urban development is occurring to find the answer to our questions on how much risk because current federal regulations require FEMA to look at only that development which exists at the time the data for their flood maps is collected. The TSARP maps are a "snap shot" of the "as built" development when the data was collected in late 2001.

A group of municipal utility districts and home owner associations have formed an alliance to seek information and solutions to this increasing flood risk. Known as the

"Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition" (CCFCC), this proactive group now representing 67 subdivisions containing 30,000 households in the watershed and HCFCD's Planning Department have teamed up to carry out a study designed to overcome the limitations of the TSARP maps in this watershed. Called the "Future Conditions Hazard Mapping" study, it will answer many questions as to how far the floodplains will expand and how much higher will the flood levels rise as more and more roads, streets, shopping centers and subdivisions are constructed in the watershed. This will be accomplished by computer modeling to simulate the effects of full urban development using the TSARP data as a beginning baseline for projecting into the future.

The HCFCD / CCFCC project team's findings derived from the "Future Conditions Study" will become an integral component integrated into the "Cypress Creek Watershed Stormwater Management Plan" scheduled to be completed in 2005.

Look Upstream articles are provided by the Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition, a 501(c)(3) organization, as a public service. Visit their website, www.ccfcc.org for more information on flood insurance, protection planning, issues and membership.

