

LOOK UPSTREAM

JULY 2008

This month's article is a re-print with permission of the publisher of the article "HCFCFCD urges residents to get flood insurance" by Valerie Jones, The Sun Newspaper / Houston Community Newspapers, 5/30/08.

With the arrival of hurricane season—the official first day was June 1—Harris County Flood Control District is encouraging residents to invest in flood insurance for their homes and belongings.

HCFCFCD has been trying to keep people informed regarding flooding potential in certain areas, and debunk certain myths that have been circulating.

Myth: If I didn't flood during Tropical Storm Allison in 2001, chances are I won't ever flood.

Fact: Most Harris County residents are vulnerable to flooding because the topography is flat, there are impermeable clay soils and the area is prone to severe thunderstorms, tropical storms and hurricanes.

"We don't want people to use Tropical Storm Allison as a gauge for whether or not they will flood in the future," said HCFCFCD spokesperson Heather Saucier. "The majority of the damaging rain that fell during Allison was in the northeast side of town."

Myth: My house is not in the 100-year floodplain, so I don't need flood insurance because I'm not at risk for flooding.

Fact: Flood Insurance Rate Maps do not show all sources of flooding.

"The floodplain maps are good guidelines for your flooding risks if a bayou or a stream were to overflow, but there are other sources of flooding in Harris County that are not depicted on the map," Saucier said. "A lot of times, we get a lot of rain in a very short period of time and our roadside ditches and storm sewers exceed their capacity, and they can't get water to the bayous fast enough. Many people will flood from water rising in the streets."

Saucier said it's possible that some residents are living near streams that have not been studied yet.

"There are 2,500 miles of channels in Harris County, but only 1,300 miles of those channels have been studied to determine if there is a floodplain associated with them," she said. "People could be living in a floodplain and not even know it."

Myth: New land development causes flooding.

Fact: Strict regulations mandate a controlled release of storm water to avoid aggravating flooding conditions.

"Developers are required to be responsible for any additional storm water runoff they create," Saucier said. "They can build on-site detentions, store storm water underground or in a regional detention basin."

Myth: A storm surge will handicap our bayou system's ability to drain.

Fact: The majority of the bayous in Harris County will continue to function effectively during a storm surge.

"When a storm surge first occurs, there will be some areas where drainage will be limited, but only temporarily," Saucier said. "These are primarily channels that drain directly into Galveston Bay. By the time the water drains into Galveston Bay, the storm surge will have receded and our bayous will function just fine."

Myth: The Flood Control District is responsible for addressing all types of flooding.

Fact: The Flood Control District is responsible for bayous and their tributaries, while the City of Houston, other municipalities and unincorporated Harris County concentrate on underground storm sewers and roadside ditches.

"Our job is to build projects that reduce people's flooding risks from bayous and the tributaries topping their banks," Saucier said. "If people have trouble with storm sewers or roadside ditches, they need to contact the city they live in, or if they're unincorporated, Harris County."

Look Upstream articles are written by the Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition (CCFCC) as a public service. Visit website www.ccfcc.org for more information on needed flood protection, environmental preservation, flood insurance and membership. or e-mail to floodalliance@ccfcc.org.

