Flood control district urges residents to protect property against flood damage

The extreme rains that hit west and northwest Harris County on April 27-28 flooded approximately 2,300 homes, according to the Harris County Flood Control District.

More than half of those homes were not located in a 100-year floodplain, underscoring the fact that all residents in the region are at risk for flooding to varying degrees and should protect themselves with flood insurance, the district says,.

Just because a home is not located in a floodplain on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Flood Insurance Rate Maps doesn't negate the need for flood insurance, the agency warns.

While floodplain maps show flooding risks from bayous or streams overflowing their banks, they do not show other types of flooding that occur, including flooding from roadside ditches and underground storm sewers exceeding their capacity.

Floodplain maps do not show flooding risks from storms greater than a 500-year flood. About 65 percent of the area that flooded during Tropical Storm Allison in 2001 was not located in a mapped floodplain because the flood registered in many places well beyond a 500-year flood.

Allison prompted many to mistakenly believe that if they did not flood during that off-the-charts tropical storm, they will most likely never flood. However, the greatest rainfall hit the northeast part of town, dropping more than 28 inches of rain in 12 hours and 35 inches of rain in five days. Many parts of Houston and Harris County received less than 5 inches.

In addition, some residents maintain if they have lived in their homes for decades and never flooded, they are not at risk for flooding. During the April rains, however, many areas in the Buffalo Bayou, Addicks and Barker watersheds experienced rainfall amounts – 8 to 10 inches widespread and isolated amounts of 10 to 11 inches in 12 hours – that have not been seen there since rainfall data began being collected in the early 1980s.

Some areas experienced a "1 percent rainfall event," an event so extreme it only has a 1 percent chance of occurring at any given location in any given year.

It's important to remember that the region has flooded for centuries, long before it was settled, so it's not wise to look at one small snapshot of time to predict flooding risks, the district warns.

Flooding has been and will continue to be the No. 1 natural hazard in Harris County for three main reasons:

- **Region is storm-prone:** The region is prone to tropical storms, hurricanes and year-round thunderstorms that drop large amounts of rain in short periods of time, inundating our drainage system;
- **Topography:** The slope of the region's terrain is equivalent to putting dimes under two legs of a 6-foot pool table. As a result, the floodplains are large, and the area takes awhile to drain; and,
- **Problematic soil:** The region has impermeable clay soils that don't absorb a lot of water, forcing stormwater to run off into area bayous and streams.

While government agencies, such as the Harris County Flood Control District, can build projects that successfully reduce flooding risks, flooding cannot be eliminated altogether.

For more information on flood insurance, visit the National Flood Insurance Web Site at www.floodsmart.gov.

For more information about the Harris County Flood Control District and its projects, visit www.hcfcd.org.