

WATER DROPS



A Letter to Our Valued Residents

We hope you enjoy the first edition of the HCMUD 132 quarterly newsletter! This new communication resource was developed for you – our valued customers – and we’re happy to bring it to you.

What to Expect

In each newsletter issue, you can expect to see relevant local information (such as HCMUD 132 project updates, important contact numbers and budget or tax information), along with interesting and informative feature articles like this issue’s “Storm Sewer Pollution: Are You Part of the Problem or the Solution”.

The Board of HCMUD 132 is committed to not only passing on information regarding our services, but also to providing you and your family with the tools you need to help conserve and protect our precious water resources. Why? As you know, our water resources, even in southeast Texas, are limited. Case in point: the mandated conversion (over the next 30 years) of much of north Harris County from groundwater to surface water. Mandated by the Harris Galveston Subsidence District (HGSD), the conversion was ordered due to the significant subsidence (or dropping) of land in certain areas due to years of heavy pumpage from our aquifers. The conversion has already begun in areas of northwest Harris County. Although HCMUD 132 may be one of the few districts that remain on well water, we will all feel the impact – even monetarily – in the coming months and years. Unlike most districts, the Directors of HCMUD 132 have voted to absorb the costs involved with surface water conversion compliance at this time. But the price of water, although still considered incredibly low in comparison to other areas of the U.S., will eventually see a rise, and the more you know about conserving, the easier that transition will be on your wallet.

Communication is Key

Whether imparting water conservation information to curb the effects of the rising cost of water, posting the latest budgets, or passing on details on the Strategic Partnership Agreement with the City of Houston, HCMUD 132 is committed to open communication with the residents of our district. We hope that this newsletter, in conjunction with our new district website

www.hcmud132.com

will provide you with informative, beneficial articles, useful local updates and contact numbers and some entertainment as well.

Enjoy!



Leaks: Money Down the Drain

We've all heard the slow drip of a faucet or the hiss of a leaking toilet, but have we really stopped to think about how much of a drain on our finances (and resources) those seemingly minor leaks can cause?

Think about this: *a leaking toilet tank can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day and cost you over 60 cents per day or almost \$20 a month!* Now, that's reason enough to take the simple steps necessary to find (and fix) those leaks.

Don't Ignore the Warning Signs

There are the obvious: a dripping faucet or a running toilet, but some leaks are a bit more conspicuous and may only be detected by closely monitoring your monthly water bill and your water meter. One of the first indications of a water leak is an unexplained increase in your monthly water bill. If the increase can't be tied back to a known spike in usage (house guests, faucet left on, increased outdoor use, etc.), then the chance of a leak (either from a faucet, toilet or a break in the water line between the meter and the house) is high.

Another way to identify leaks is to monitor your water meter. To do so, you will need two hours of no water usage.

First step: turn off all the water – inside and outside the house. Write down the reading on the meter and the position of the sweep hand, and wait at least two hours. At the end of this time, read the meter again. If the second reading is different from the first, that means water is still flowing through the meter and you've got a leak to find... and fix!

Start With the Toilet

Most household water leaks occur here and testing to find out if you have one is a snap. Just take your basic food coloring (any color) out of the pantry and you're ready to go. Flush the toilet and then put enough food coloring in the tank to color the water. Don't flush the toilet again for at least an hour. If the water in the bowl of the toilet shows coloring, you have a leak that needs to be repaired.



Simple Fix for a Leaky Faucet

Leaky faucets... especially those with slow drips can be ignored for long periods of time. It's easy to put off some-

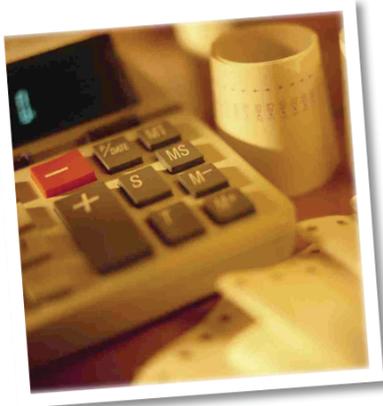


thing that seems to have so little impact. But what if we told you that *even the slowest of drips can cost you over \$20 per year!* Remember to check faucets inside and outside the home. In most cases, leaks can be fixed by replacing a worn washer or "O" ring... it's simple and inexpensive.

I Still Can't Find the Leak

If you're sure there's a leak, but you're having trouble finding its source, also look at your water softener, sprinkling system or a swimming pool with an automatic fill device. Still no luck? It may be time to call in an expert. They will more than likely find the elusive leak and get it fixed. Taking care of the problem sooner than later is key. Every day a leak isn't fixed, valuable water and money are wasted.

Another Significant Tax Rate Decrease: HCMUD 132 Working for You



Great news for this year’s tax rate... an unprecedented 24% reduction from last year. The new tax rate of \$0.35 per \$100 of assessed value versus last year’s rate of \$0.46 carries on a tax rate decrease trend that has continued for over ten years. And if you qualify for any of the exemptions outlined below, your taxes paid savings can be even greater. HCMUD 132’s significant tax rate reduction (due in part to the recent Strategic Partnership Agreement with the City of Houston which avoided residential annexation by the city and resulted in a 1% increase in local sales tax) allows the District to give back in a big way.

“We are finally realizing a financial result due to our involvement with the Strategic Partnership Agreement with the City of Houston,” said HCMUD 132

Board President, Ray Hughes. “It was a challenging road, but along with deferring any chance of annexation for 30 years, we are able to save the taxpayer’s some money through the tax rate reduction.”

As you know, individual taxes may increase or decrease depending on the change in the taxable value of your property. For example, a home valued at \$154,108 in 2005 was appraised at \$158,175 in 2006 – an increase of just 2.6%. Take into account the general exemptions available (a homestead exemption of 20% of your home’s value for those who qualify) and the taxable value comes out to \$126,540. Now that’s a significant savings!

Take Advantage of Those Exemptions!

As you prepare for tax season, make sure you’re taking advantage of all applicable exemptions. Each year, a number of residents miss out on sometimes considerable savings, especially senior citizens. For those unsure as to whether certain exemptions have been applied, check the HCAD (Harris County Appraisal District) website at www.hcad.org. If all is in order, exemptions will be automatically applied to all taxing offices that your property is situated in.

Harris County Exemptions Offered:

- Homestead Exemption: 20% of the home’s value to all homeowners who designate the home as their primary residence

- Over-65 Homeowners: \$156,240 off the home’s value on all county taxes
- Homeowners with Disabilities: \$156,240 off the home’s value on all county taxes

Humble ISD

Exemptions Offered:

- Homestead Exemption: \$15,000 off the home’s value to all homeowners who designate the home as their primary residence
- Over-65 Homeowners: Homeowners will receive a *valuation freeze* for school taxes (meaning that your home value will not increase unless you make improvements to your home). Homeowners are also offered an exemption of \$15,000 off the home’s value.
- Homeowners with Disabilities: \$10,000 off the home’s value

HCMUD 132

Exemptions Offered:

- Homestead Exemption: the maximum exemption of 20% of the home’s value to all homeowners who designate the home as their primary residence
- Over-65 Homeowners: \$30,000 off the home’s value
- Homeowners with Disabilities: \$30,000 off the home’s value.

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Harris County MUD 132 Project Updates



Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation

Harris County MUD 132 (“the District”) has completed cleaning and televising its sanitary sewer system. To eliminate inflow and groundwater infiltration into the sanitary sewer system, the District has funded over \$1.83 million in three phases of sewer main rehabilitation in residential areas of the District. Portions of the sanitary sewer system will be rehabilitated in future projects. Due to consecutive ruptures in an 18-inch sewer force main along FM 1960 East, an emergency project to rehabilitate the force main was authorized. Harris County MUDs 151 and 153 share capacity in the force main and were participants in the project. These projects have been funded through a combination of operating and bond funds.

Atascocita Central Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion

In 2005, the board of directors for the wastewater treatment plant awarded the \$11,269,020 contract to LEM Construction Company, Inc. for improvements to meet ammonia limitations and expansion of the capacity from 6.0 million gallons per day (mgd) to 9.0 mgd. The construction has been phased to minimize interruptions and accommodate the on-going treatment plant operations. The District funded its \$1.5 million portion of the project with bond funds.

Emergency Power Generators

The District has awarded a contract in the amount of \$941,636.50 to C. F. McDonald Electric, Inc. to install new generators at the three sanitary sewer lift stations and to replace the existing aging generators at the District’s two water plants. To ensure uninterrupted power at the plant sites during emergencies, the new generators will be fueled by natural gas.

TAX RATE DECREASE CONTINUED:

Over-65 Homeowners

As discussed, a homeowner who is 65 or older may receive additional exemptions. You are eligible for these exemptions as soon as you turn 65; you don’t need to be 65 as of the first of the year you apply. You must, however, verify with the Harris County Appraisal District that you are 65 or older to qualify.

Homeowners with Disabilities

As discussed, homeowners with disabilities may qualify for additional exemptions.

To verify if you are eligible for these and other exemptions, contact the Harris County Appraisal District’s Telephone Information Center at 713-957-7800.

* Exemption information pulled from the Harris County Appraisal District website: www.hcad.org.



WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Sadly, we have taken our water supplies for granted and have not always been careful about how we have used this valuable natural resource. Our drinking water is going to cost more in the future, so it is important that we learn to use it wisely.

Find leaks and fix them...even the smallest drip can waste up to 20 gallons a day. That may only be 6 cents a day but it adds up to \$1.83 per month, or \$21.96 per year.

MEET OUR OPERATOR: Leroy Mensik of Severn Trent Services

For almost thirteen years, Severn Trent Services has served our community as HCMUD 132’s operator, and for eleven of those thirteen years, Leroy Mensik has been our contact and friend. In the early stages of development for this newsletter, we decided it was important that our residents get to know the consultants that work for them on our behalf. Water district operators play a daily, vital role in the upkeep and maintenance of our water plants, along with serving as a direct interface with residents for billing and repair issues. Leroy Mensik of Severn Trent Services fills us in on his company’s role with HCMUD 132:

Q: What are the responsibilities of Severn Trent Services?

A: On a daily basis, our operators visit both water plants and all three lift stations within the boundaries of HCMUD 132. We make sure everything is operating as expected and take samples of the water to ensure it is being treated properly. Our field personnel also make any necessary repairs to the system and handle any customer calls that come in.

Q: What types of issues would a resident of HCMUD 132 call Severn Trent Services to handle?

A: The most common calls we receive are for water leaks, sewer stoppages and odors, low water pressure or concerns about discolored or dirty water. Of course we also handle any billing issues that may arise.

Q: What types of issues would NOT be handled by Severn Trent Services (possibly handled by a plumber)?

A: Any type of water line problems that happen beyond the meter or any sewer problems that happen beyond the sewer main.

Q: What challenges lay ahead for HCMUD 132 and Severn Trent Services and what do you hope to accomplish in the upcoming year(s)?

A: The biggest challenge will be the maintenance of an aging system. The system is approximately 25-years-old and that means some unpredictability. In the past two years, the District took a huge step in preventing major problems in the sewer system by authorizing the televising and repair to the sewer system. On the water side, there’s a possibility we’ll see tap line leaks and main breaks, along with pump and well problems. Minimizing the impact to customers by making quick repairs is our number one priority.

Q: What do you feel has been Severn Trent Services’ biggest accomplishment since partnering with HCMUD 132?

A: We have a strong working relationship with the District...the trust they’ve shown us has been really rewarding. We are also very committed to staying on top of things...being proactive – it helps keep residential issues to a minimum. But from time to time, problems will arise...it is how we deal with them that matters. Over the years, we’ve been really successful at responding quickly and doing our best to resolve them in a timely manner.



Storm Sewer Pollution: Are You Part of the Problem or the Solution?

Do you know where storm water and other debris goes after it flows into the storm sewer? Probably through some intricate piping system to a water treatment plant where all the impurities are filtered out. Right? WRONG.

Consider This

The water that flows into your storm sewer is discharged *untreated* into the very bodies of water we use for swimming, fishing, and even drinking water. So, think back. Have you been helping or hurting our water sources? Are you using your lawn fertilizers properly? And what about grass clippings and other debris – have you or your neighbors ever swept them into the sewers? What can YOU do to ensure rainwater isn't carrying harmful substances down the sewer and into our lakes, streams, rivers and coastal waters? Read below for important information to begin doing your part in preventing stormwater pollution today.

What is Stormwater Pollution?

Whether it's a light spring shower or a torrential summer downpour, when rainwater reaches the earth, it begins to flow over the ground, picking up debris, chemicals, dirt and other pollutants along the way. The resulting "stormwater pollution" is then carried into our storm sewers, directly into our waterways, or seeps into the ground, sometimes reaching our groundwater reserves.

"But I Don't Do Enough to Cause Any Major Damage"

Maybe not, but add your possibly minor contribution to stormwater pollution to the waste from thousands of other homes in this city – and we've got a major problem. In fact, more water pollution comes from this deluge of dirt, trash and toxics than from all the sewage and industrial plants in the nation.* Bottom line: We all play a part in keeping our water sources clear of nonpoint-source pollutants.

*Source: www.lcra.org



The Impact is Real

Without careful planning and the cooperation of our communities, stormwater pollution can have devastating effects on our water quality, our plant and animal life, and even on us. In fact:

- Excess nutrients carried into water sources by stormwater runoff can cause algae blooms. When algae die, they sink to the bottom and decompose in a process that removes oxygen from the water. Fish and other aquatic organisms can't exist in water with low dissolved oxygen levels.
- Sediment can cloud the water and destroy aquatic habitats by making it difficult or impossible for aquatic plants to grow.
- Debris, such as plastic bags, six-pack rings, bottles, and cigarette butts washed into water bodies can choke, suffocate, or disable aquatic life like ducks, fish, turtles, and birds.
- Bacteria and other pathogens can wash into swimming areas and create health hazards, often making beach closures necessary.
- Household hazardous wastes like insecticides, pesticides, paint, solvents, used motor oil, and other auto fluids can poison aquatic life. In turn, land animals and humans can become sick from eating diseased fish and shellfish or ingesting polluted water.
- Polluted stormwater often affects drinking water sources, causing health problems and increased drinking water treatment costs.

Start Making a Difference Today (Stormwater Pollution Solutions)

Residential

Recycle or properly dispose of household products that contain chemicals, such as insecticides, pesticides, paint, solvents, and used motor oil and other auto fluids. Don't pour them onto the ground or into storm drains.

Lawn Care

Excess fertilizers and pesticides applied to lawns and gardens wash off and pollute streams. In addition, yard clippings and leaves can wash into storm drains and contribute nutrients and organic matter to streams.

- Don't over-water your lawn. Consider using a soaker hose instead of a sprinkler.
- Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly. When use is necessary, use the chemicals in the recommended amounts. Use organic mulch or safer pest control methods whenever possible.
- Compost or mulch yard waste. Don't leave it in the street or sweep it into storm drains or streams.
- Cover piles of dirt or mulch being used in landscaping projects.
- Don't apply fertilizer before a rain. The rain may wash the fertilizer into creeks and streams.
- Use a mulching lawnmower to allow the clippings to fertilize the lawn and retain moisture.



Auto Care

Washing your car and degreasing auto parts at home can send detergents and other contaminants through the storm sewer system. Dumping automotive fluids into storm drains has the same result as dumping the materials directly into a waterbody.

- Use a commercial car wash that treats or recycles its wastewater, or wash your car on your yard so the water infiltrates into the ground.
- Repair leaks and dispose of used auto fluids and batteries at designated drop-off or recycling locations.

Pet Waste

Pet waste can be a major source of bacteria and excess nutrients in local waters.

- When walking your pet, remember to pick up the waste and dispose of it properly. Flushing pet waste is the best disposal method.
- Leaving pet waste on the ground increases public health risks by allowing harmful bacteria and nutrients to wash into the storm drain and eventually into local water bodies.

Education is essential to changing people's behavior. Signs and markers near storm drains warn residents that pollutants entering the drains will be carried untreated into a local water body.

Residential Landscaping

- **Permeable Pavement:** Traditional concrete and asphalt don't allow water to soak into the ground. Instead the surfaces rely on storm drains to divert unwanted water. Permeable pavement systems allow rain to soak through, decreasing stormwater runoff.
- **Rain Barrels:** Collect rainwater from rooftops in mosquito-proof containers. The water can be used later on lawn or garden areas.
- **Rain Gardens and Grassy Swales:** Specially designed areas planted with native plants can provide natural places for rainwater to collect and soak into the ground. Rain from rooftop areas or paved areas can be diverted into these areas rather than into storm drains.

WHO TO CALL:

Water, sewer and drainage questions:

Harris County MUD 132 Customer Service Office
3928 Kingwood Dr.
Kingwood, TX 77339
(281) 358-2828
Regular Office Hours: 7:30 – 4:00 (M-F)
After Hours: (281) 358-2828; 24 hrs/7 days a week

NOTE: If you have water or sewer related problems, PLEASE CALL US BEFORE YOU CALL THE PLUMBER! We will investigate the problem at no cost to you. If it is found to be a water district-related problem, we will arrange to correct it. If it is not a water district issue, we will provide our advice. Remember, we are here to help!

Information, Please.

HCMUD 132 Tax Questions

Bob Leared Interests at (713) 932-9011 (ask for the HCMUD 132 rep)

Garbage Service

Waste Management at (713) 686-6666

HCMUD 132 Board Meetings

The Harris County MUD 132 Board generally meets the 3rd Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM at the Harris County Library (Atascocita Branch) - 19520 Pinehurst Trials Drive. Meetings are open to the public and residents are encouraged to attend.

Visit us online: www.hcmud132.com

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