

# WATER DROPS

**Harris County Municipal  
Utility District 132**

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*Assistant Secretary*

## To Our Valued Residents...

It's hard to believe that spring is once again upon us. Each season...each year for that matter...seems to whiz by with increasing speed! Keeping you - our residents - updated as to the activities and responsibilities of HCMUD 132 is important to us, and we hope this newsletter and our website ([www.hcmud132.com](http://www.hcmud132.com)) are helping us do that in the most efficient and informative way possible.

### In This Issue

In addition to providing specific HCMUD 132-related news - such as tax rate, engineering, and election updates - it is also our goal to include informative articles that help us use our energy and natural resources in the most efficient way possible. In **A Simple Step to Start Saving Energy Today**, you'll see that saving energy and money is as easy as switching your incandescent bulbs to the new, highly-efficient CFLs (Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs). And in **Give Your Lawn a Boost This Spring**, we provide loads of tips on the best ways to conserve water and avoid a rising water bill as the heat index climbs.

At HCMUD 132, we are committed to providing you with stellar service, while helping this community - through education and programs - to conserve our precious natural resources. As always, if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to give us a call.

**Board of Directors, Harris County MUD 132**

## HCMUD 132 Raises Exemption Cap for Over-65 Homeowners and Homeowners with Disabilities

Despite ongoing investment in necessary repair and upgrades to our aging infrastructure, last year's tax rate of \$0.35 per \$100 of assessed value will remain the same and certain exemptions (outlined in this article) will increase. The decision to avoid a tax rate increase continues a more than ten-year trend of static or decreasing rates. After last year's unprecedented 24% decrease (from \$0.46 per \$100 of assessed value

to \$0.35), HCMUD 132 is proud to be able to continue to keep your rates low.

"The Board of MUD132 has consistently voted to ease the tax burden on residents by reducing the tax rate and/or increasing exemptions when possible," said HCMUD 132 board Vice President, Marie Wilkinson. "Our Homestead Exemption is \$20,000, the maximum allowed

*Continued on page 2*



## Exemption Information

Continued from page 1

by law. This year we voted to increase the exemption for homeowners over 65 years of age as well as the disabled from \$30,000 to \$40,000 for tax year 2008. These are real and tangible benefits resulting from the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with the City of Houston."

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 \$126,550 in 2006 was appraised at \$134,467 in 2007 - an increase of 6.2%. 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 \$107,574. Now that's a meaningful difference!

### Don't Miss Out On Significant 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](http://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: **increased from \$30,000 to \$40,000 off the home's value.**
- Homeowners with Disabilities: **increased from \$30,000 to \$40,000 off the home's value.**

### Over-65 Homeowners

As shown above, 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 shown above, 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](http://www.hcad.org). ■



## If it were this hard to get water perhaps we'd be more careful how we use it!

The days of cheap and plentiful water supplies are behind us...and it is time that we all learn to use this precious natural resource more efficiently. During the spring and summer months, about 50 percent of all the water we use in Texas is for landscape irrigation...and about half of this water is wasted! If you have an irrigation system, please check it routinely for leaks and make sure the water is delivered where you intend...not on the street or sidewalk.

Also add a rain sensor -- this may well be the most important thing you can do to avoid excessive and unnecessary watering, and will also save you money on your water bill.

**You can use water more efficiently and still maintain a terrific looking yard!**

# Harris County MUD 132 Project Updates

## Geographical Information System (GIS) Database

The District is creating an electronic database of all the water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer mains in the District and the associated construction plans and recorded plats. The above-ground facilities (manholes, fire hydrants, gate valves, storm inlets, etc.) were surveyed to create an accurate base map. The GIS database will allow the consultants to access the information through an interactive web map. Map books for the District's field operations crews will be easily updated and reprinted from this GIS.

## Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation

Although the District has already 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 as operating funds will allow. Budgeting for 2008 includes funding for the fourth phase of rehabilitation. Construction will not begin until later this year.

## Atascocita Central Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion

In 2005, the Board of Directors for the wastewater treat-

ment 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 mgd (million gallons per day) to 9.0 mgd. The construction was completed in a manner that minimized interruptions and accommodated the on-going treatment plant operations.

The District funded its \$1.5 million portion of the project with bond funds. The facilities were fully transferred into operation in November 2007 and the final walk-through inspection by the TCEQ was on February 29th. ■

## HCMUD 132 Directors Election Information

Harris County Municipal Utility District No. 132 will hold a Directors Election on Saturday, May 10, 2008. Voting will take place at the Atascocita Branch of the Harris County Library: 19520 Pinehurst Trails Drive (7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) and will be for the purpose of electing three Directors for the District, each of whom will serve a four-year term.

Early voting will also take place at the Atascocita Branch of the Harris County Library from Monday, April 28, 2008 to Tuesday, May 6, 2008 (12:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.) - excluding Saturdays and Sundays.

For more information, including details on early voting by mail, visit our website at [www.hcmud132.com](http://www.hcmud132.com), and click on the "May 10, 2008 Director's Election" link.



## ESD 46 Directors Election Information

Emergency Services District 46, a taxing and governing board of the Atascocita Fire Department, will hold a Directors Election -- in conjunction with the School Board election -- on May 10, 2008 (7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.) at the Oaks Elementary School.

Early voting will take place at Fire Station One, 7600 Farmingham Rd, from April 28, 2008 to May 6, 2008 (9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday - Friday; 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Saturday). ♦

# Give Your Lawn a Boost This Spring

Spring is a time of rebirth for your lawn...grass wakes from its winter hibernation and plants and trees show the first signs of sprouting leaves and blooming flowers. Spring may also be a time - for those who haven't already - to reevaluate your lawn care practices. In this era of rising water costs, new irrigation techniques (paired with tried and true conservation practices) are more important than ever.

## How much water does your yard REALLY need?

Odds are it needs a whole lot less than you give it. In fact, landscape irrigation can account for more than 50% of all the water used in Texas during the summer - and about half of that water is wasted due to over-watering or runoff.

We've all seen the automatic sprinkler systems running in the middle of a downpour or water streaming down the driveway from an already saturated lawn. These are classic examples of wasteful watering practices and all too prevalent. Consider the following tips this spring to save water in our community while providing your lawn with the proper amount of water to help it thrive:

- ◆ Add a rain sensor to your irrigation system. This may well be the most important thing you can do to avoid excessive and unnecessary watering, and it will save you money on your water bill!
- ◆ Remember, it is always better to water deeply versus frequently - it encourages well established root

systems. Soil should be soaked to a minimum depth of six inches, and should not be watered again until the soil an inch below the surface is dry. Healthy, properly irrigated lawns rarely require more than one inch of water per week during the summer months (unless there is an extended dry spell).

- ◆ Check irrigation system timers. It's always best to water in the early morning hours (3-5 a.m.) for maximum effectiveness. Watering in the heat of the day can cause much of the water to evaporate before it ever reaches your lawn or plants/flower beds.

- ◆ If you don't have one, or are looking into a more effective, cost-efficient irrigation system than you currently have, consider low output sprinkler heads, bubblers, or drip irrigation systems. And make sure you work with an experienced, licensed professional, well-versed in designing and installing the system that will work best for your unique yard. Individuals should be licensed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and should be able to show you their license number. Ask for it to ensure you're working with a qualified specialist.

- ◆ Don't cut your grass too short. Mowing grass at the proper height (three inches for St. Augustine and one inch for Bermuda)

decreases the need for watering. Cutting grass any lower can cut into the stem and cause it to lose its ability to photosynthesize - making it more susceptible to disease and insect problems.

## Consider Organic Alternatives

We can't stress strongly enough the benefits of using organic mulches such as pine needles, pine bark, straw, leaves, wood shavings, compost or sawdust to help your yard reach its full potential. Organic mulches reduce soil temperature, conserve moisture, and control weeds that compete with desirable plants for a drink. Two inches of mulch used around plants twice a year will allow your plants and flowers to thrive.

When fertilizing, we also recommend using an organic fertilizer. Synthetic fertilizers can kill off beneficial organisms in the soil, resulting in more insect, disease and weed problems, while organic fertilizers allow the good microorganisms to grow stronger. Just as important, synthetic fertilizers can



pollute our streams and other waterways and can also be a potential danger to ourselves, our pets and ironically, to our plants. It just pays to go organic. You will see a wonderful difference in the quality of your lawn, plants and shrubs, while eliminating any related health worries -- for you, your family, and your neighbors.

### **No Two Yards Are Alike**

Finding out what your lawn needs to be fed is extremely valuable information and well worth the minimal cost of around \$25-\$30. Send a soil sample to the Texas A&M Soil Science Lab to find out what deficiencies you may have in your soil and what nutrients are needed to bring it back to beautiful! And, as always, when purchasing new plants, consider native, drought-tolerant varieties...they'll require less work and less water and can be just as beautiful as other less-tolerant options.

Visit your local nursery to find out more about creating the best yard possible in the best way possible. Happy planting! ■

### **For more information and tips on the web, visit:**

■ **Texas A&M Cooperative Extension Service:** <http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/>

■ **Texas A&M Soil Science Lab:** <http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/>

■ **Texas Water Development Board:** <http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/assistance/conservation/pubs.asp>

■ **Southeast Texas Gardening:** <http://www.southeasttexasgardening.info/recommendedplants.htm>

**Please Use Water Wisely**

## **HCMUD 132 Board Member Spotlight**

Don House, elected to the position of Assistant Secretary of HCMUD 132 in 2006, is a man dedicated to serving his community.

"For over 30 years, I have benefited from all this community has to offer," said House. "I am proud to be a part of this Board and am committed to living up to the expectations of those who elected me."

To say Don House is committed may be an understatement. A resident of Atascocita since 1977, husband to wife, June, for over 40 years, and Sales Manager at Atascocita-based Gulf Packaging since 1979 - it's clear to see that loyalty and dedication are part of his very makeup. Lucky for us, House brings that same dedication and commitment to his role as the Board's liaison with our District engineer.

"Our first priority is to supply quality water and sewer service to this community," said House. "Our infrastructure is over 30 years old and it is the job of this Board to ensure we do all we can to eliminate failures in that system."

Although much work is focused on making the necessary upgrades and repairs to keep the infrastructure in good, safe working order, it is also important to House, as well as the rest of the MUD 132 Board, that tax rates are kept as low as possible.

"Infrastructure maintenance and repairs are imperative, but they cost money," said House. "So we are extremely proud that, in light of those costs, we have been able to get tax rates down to the rates that were levied in the mid 1990s. In addition, we have increased exemptions. That means that the property taxes each of us



**Don House**

pay in this District are steadily dropping - and will go down again this year."

House is also interested in supplying other services in the future to improve the quality of life in this area. With rapid commercial growth, he feels that sales tax revenue from the SPA (Strategic Partnership Agreement) with the City of Houston will help the Board to do just that.

"The SPA revenues this year will exceed the property tax revenue," said House. "At some point in the not-too-distant future, we will be able to supply other services to our residents, while at the same time continuing to reduce the property tax. I want to be part of seeing to it that those funds are spent wisely...that they are used for quality-of-life improvements to serve the best interests of our area and fellow residents."

Don and June House have four children and eleven grandchildren and enjoy spending as much time as possible with each and every one of them. We thank House for also choosing to spend a portion of his time serving on the Board of MUD 132, and we hope he continues to do so for many years to come. ■

# A Simple Step to Start Saving Energy Today

How many times have you heard the word "green" in the past year? Odds are, quite a bit. The **Going Green** message is hitting us from all sides...every media outlet features stories on it, giant wind power turbines are popping up across the country and most car manufacturers have changed their advertising messages from "luxurious" and "powerful" to "fuel-efficient" and "eco-friendly".

Saving energy, gas, water...even our planet, seems to rest squarely on our shoulders - and, let's be honest - the subject can be a bit overwhelming. Plug "going green" into your favorite Internet search engine and it won't produce hundreds or even thousands of results...oh no...it will produce *hundreds of MILLIONS*. Helping to preserve and protect our natural resources is a good thing, but how do we get started? Sure, you can buy a new hybrid vehicle, but maybe that kind of big expenditure isn't in your budget right now. You want to help make a difference, but how do you do so without breaking the bank?

## It's as Easy as Changing a Light Bulb

The key to changing energy-wasting habits is to **start simple**. Minor changes can have a major impact...especially over time. And many options require very little effort on your part. One simple option is as easy as changing a light bulb. In fact, that's exactly what you do.

Your common light bulb -- or incandescent bulb -- is *notoriously inefficient*. Ninety percent (yes, you heard that right) of the energy incandescent bulbs use is simply wasted as heat. As a result, Congress is working to enact a na-

tional energy-saving lighting standard...one that requires more light per energy unit than is currently yielded by the popular light bulb.

### CFLs

A likely replacement for the inefficient incandescent is something you've probably already seen in your local grocery or hardware store. It's the CFL, or "compact fluorescent light bulb". This funny-looking bulb looks more like a curly-q than your traditional bulb, but don't let the looks fool you. This highly efficient alternative converts **75%** of electrical current into light and will save you **\$50** over an expected 10,000 hour life span (that's 6 to 10 times longer than your current bulb).

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***"If every American home replaced just one incandescent light bulb with an ENERGY-STAR-qualified CFL, America would save enough energy to light more than 2.5 million homes for a year and prevent greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions of nearly 800,000 cars...and if ALL incandescent bulbs were replaced, estimated electricity savings could be as high as \$18 billion per year."***\*

*\*Source: Philips/Wall Street Journal*

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### How to Choose the Right Bulb

The first thing you'll notice when considering a CFL is the higher price, which can easily run 10 to 15 times the price of incandescents. But remember, we're thinking long term...not short term. Depending on usage,



they can pay for themselves in as little as six months and, as stated earlier, last up to 10,000 hours. So, you're saving loads of energy (and the resulting cooling cost to counteract the wasteful heat output of regular bulbs) and money. It's a win-win.

When choosing wattage (or "lumens" as they are called in CFLs), consider the following:

- Where will the bulb be located and for what purpose will it be used: CFL light output can be a bit dimmer, so if you are replacing a bulb in a reading lamp, you may consider replacing a 60 watt bulb with a CFL with lumens comparable to 100 or more watts. For other uses, you may find a 60 watt equivalent to be plenty. It's all about finding what works for you.
- Read the packaging to be sure that the type chosen works for the fixture you have in mind (e.g., if a light fixture is connected to a dimmer or 3-way switch, select CFLs that are labeled for this use).
- For recessed fixtures, use a "reflector" CFL versus a standard-shaped bulb.
- Choose the color that works best for you (e.g., while most CFLs are created with warm colors for the home, choose a cooler color for

task lighting).

For more information on proper usage of CFLs, what to do if a bulb breaks, and proper disposal options, visit [www.energy.star.gov](http://www.energy.star.gov) and click on "Lighting" under the "Products" section.

### Disposal and Recycling

Speaking of proper disposal, your CFLs, along with the "household hazardous waste" items listed below, can now be dropped off at either of the city's two new Environmental Service Centers (ESC). ESC South (at 11500 South Post Oak) is open Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and the second Saturday of each month from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and the

ESC North (a bit closer to us at 5614 Neches - near the 59 / 610 interchange) is open every second Thursday of the month from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

### Other Household Hazardous Wastes accepted at both ESC locations:

- Old Paints
- Pesticides
- Household cleaners
- Solvents
- Antifreeze
- Batteries
- Fuel
- Motor Oil
- Residential electronic scrap items, such as: monitors, CPUs, televisions, VCRs, etc.

The City of Houston also

provides a drop-off point for basic recyclable items at the Kingwood Park & Ride (3210 W. Lake Houston Parkway) on the 2nd and 4th weekends of each month.

Accepted items include:

- Newspaper, magazines, office paper
- Glass food & beverage bottles and jars (no ceramics or plate glass)
- Plastic bottles and jugs (marked #1 and #2 only)
- Aluminum and tin food cans
- Cardboard boxes (must be broken down with packing materials removed)

Try CFLs and recycling today to start making a difference! Your electricity bill and our overcrowded landfills will thank you!

# Help Stop Stormwater Pollution

Find the hidden words within the grid of letters.



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R K S G X O W K Y P A F Y R C
E K N T X L R A O M F E T U I
T E M E O E W L V N J R I N X
A H O K K R L R S M N T N O O
W F P A E U M Z X O T I U F T
D G L T T T N S I E D L M F S
N D A I X P R T E G W I M A U
U W O E T R A G C W K Z O V J
O N T M P R P O N D E E C T M
R S T N E M T A E R T R E E Q
G B T P C O N C R E T E A R P
S T O R M W A T E R R D Y P C
R O S E E U O Y A B O A Q N K
C S M W W A T D A W K J I W J
W U N V N Z M U N D J C N N L

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bayou  
community  
concrete  
cooperation

creek  
fertilizer  
groundwater  
lake

meadow  
pollution  
pond  
rain

runoff  
stormsewer  
stormwater  
stream

toxic  
treatment  
waterway

# 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 Trails Drive. Meetings are open to the public and residents are encouraged to attend.

**Visit us online:** [www.hcmud132.com](http://www.hcmud132.com)

Harris County MUD No. 132  
c/o Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P.  
1301 McKinney, Suite 5100  
Houston, TX 77101-3095

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