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**HARRIS COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL DISTRICT  
RELEASES  
FLOOD HAZARD RECOVERY DATA**

*New Data on Floodplains and Floodways for Five Watersheds*

*Information Accessible via Internet*

HOUSTON (March 8, 2004) – The Harris County Flood Control District (District) released Flood Hazard Recovery Data (Data) today for the Brays Bayou, Goose Creek, Jackson Bayou, Luce Bayou, and San Jacinto River (north of I-10) watersheds, as part of the [Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project \(TSARP\)](#).

The Data represents the 1% and 0.2% floodplains (100- and 500-year) and floodways for these watersheds using the latest engineering methods and technology. The Data has been developed by the District and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and will be used to produce new Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs) for communities in Harris County. The DFIRMs are expected to be released in preliminary format by FEMA in late Spring.

The District believes that the floodplain and floodway boundaries reflected in the Data will be virtually identical to those reflected in the preliminary DFIRMs. This confidence is due in large measure to advances in technology that have allowed a more accurate understanding of Harris County's flood risks than what was previously possible. Of particular note, is the extensive use of an aerial laser technology developed by NASA called LiDAR that was used to define the ground surface.

The District stresses that Flood Hazard Recovery Data is not a preliminary DFIRM. The administrative process to adopt the DFIRMs will begin when FEMA issues the maps in preliminary form in late Spring. Flood insurance requirements and rates are not affected by the current release of Data.

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## Educating the Public About Flood Risks

“The Harris County Flood Control District is providing Flood Hazard Recovery Data now in order to provide the public and their communities as much time as possible to learn about possible changes to the mapped floodplains and floodways,” explained Mike Talbott, Director of the Harris County Flood Control District. “To our knowledge, Data in this format and detail has never been released to a community prior to the release of preliminary DFIRMs.”

It is hoped that the public will use the Data and the knowledge generated by TSARP to become aware of their flood risks and take appropriate steps to deal with these risks, including the purchase of flood insurance.

“An informed community is a more damage resistant community,” Talbott said.

## Addresses Searches via the Internet

Flood Hazard Recovery Data is available through the TSARP web site: [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org).

Residents in the Brays, Goose, Jackson, Luce and San Jacinto watersheds will be able to view Flood Hazard Recovery Data by typing in their street address and zip code. They will be able to view a map of their neighborhood and see the latest information on flood boundaries for the 1% and 0.2% floodplains (100- and 500-year) and floodways for these areas.

Engineering data regarding these watersheds can be ordered on the TSARP web site, including LiDAR topographic data, hydrologic and hydraulic computer models (with supporting information) and plotted water surface profiles for the studied streams.

As additional Flood Hazard Recovery Data becomes available for the remaining 17 watersheds in Harris County, it will be released on Mondays in the order in which the work is completed.

While the best information about the TSARP effort and the Data can be found at the [TSARP web site](http://www.tsarp.org), the District has also established a telephone number for additional questions at 713-722-7227.

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## Important Facts To Keep In Perspective

As the public begins to review the Flood Hazard Recovery Data, the District underscores the importance of keeping the following in perspective:

- The current FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Harris County are a solid and largely accurate representation of where the highest risks of flooding exist. New technologies and engineering methods allow for a more detailed understanding of these risks.
- TSARP represents an entirely *new* study of flooding potential, not an *update* of old information. As such, it is not correct to characterize floodplain changes as an “increase” or “decrease” in flood risk – it is simply a *new understanding* of our flood risk. For example, the detail of the ground surface defined by LiDAR is unprecedented and represents a significant difference. The new study also uses new and larger rainfall values based on additional years of rainfall records.
- Ongoing and future flood damage reduction projects will help shrink floodplains in many areas, thereby lessening flood risks throughout the County. For example, a massive flood damage reduction project on Brays Bayou, “Project Brays,” is well underway and is the largest flood damage reduction project in the history of Harris County. Project Brays is a \$450 million effort being conducted by the District in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- If an individual finds that they do not lie within an estimated 1% or 0.2% (100- or 500-year floodplain), they should not assume that they possess no risk of flooding. Every portion of Harris County possesses some risk of flooding due to the flat terrain, clay soils, and intense levels and volumes of rainfall that this region can receive. Intense local rainfall can cause flooding well away from any channel as water tries to flow overland, and severe storms can produce more rainfall than what is depicted by the mapped floodplains (both scenarios were very evident with Tropical Storm Allison). Flood insurance is an important way for individuals to protect themselves from unidentified flooding risks.

## Community Outreach and Education

The District encourages organizations that are interested in learning more about TSARP and the Flood Hazard Recovery Data to have members visit the project web site [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), or schedule a presentation by contacting the District’s Planning Department at 713-684-4015.

More information about the history of flooding in Harris County, the evolution of the county's drainage network, and what is being done about local flooding can be found at the Harris County Flood Control District’s web site – [www.hcfcd.org](http://www.hcfcd.org).

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## **Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project Flood Hazard Recovery Data**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **What is the Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project?**

The Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project is a joint effort between the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Harris County Flood Control District (District) to gather information about Tropical Storm Allison and to create new flood hazard information for all of Harris County. It will result in the citizens of Harris County having more information about flooding and being better prepared for the next flood. More details about TSARP can be found at [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org). The project will ultimately result in new FEMA Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (or DFIRMs) for all of Harris County.

The new DFIRMs are being developed using state-of-the-art technologies and will be released in preliminary form by FEMA in late spring. Flood Hazard Recovery Data representing a “preview” of the new information will be released to the community as they become available prior to the release of the preliminary DFIRMs.

#### **What is Flood Hazard Recovery Data?**

Flood Hazard Recovery Data is information that has been gathered and developed through TSARP in support of the new Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Flood Hazard Recovery Data includes, but is not limited to, LiDAR topographic data for Harris County, 2-foot contour maps for Harris County derived from the LiDAR data, a new survey benchmark control network, hydrologic and hydraulic computer models (and supporting information), channel profiles, and maps of the 1% and 0.2% floodplains (100- and 500-year) and floodways. As completed phases of data become available, it is being released to the public.

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**Why are you releasing Flood Hazard Recovery Data to the public?**

The Harris County Flood Control District and FEMA believe it is very important for the public to be informed about their flood risks. For this reason, Data is being released as phases of the project are completed. The project team hopes the public uses this information to become better educated about their flood risks. The Data is NOT being used for regulatory or flood insurance purposes at this time.

**Why are Harris County's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM's) being revised as part of the TSARP project? Are the existing maps wrong?**

The Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Harris County are good representations of where the highest risks of flooding exist. The information has been kept current since its initial development in the early 1980's through updated studies related to flood damage reduction projects and land development projects. However, new technologies related to gathering ground surface information, engineering methods, and computer simulations allow for a more detailed analysis of flooding potential. The TSARP effort also studied about 100 stream miles more than the existing floodplain information. The District and FEMA remain committed to providing current and accurate floodplain information.

**Will the Flood Hazard Recovery Data work maps look like the information on the new Flood Insurance Rate Maps ?**

The floodplain information on the Flood Hazard Recovery Data watershed work maps should be nearly identical to what is presented on the preliminary DFIRMs to be released by FEMA in late spring. However, the Flood Hazard Recovery Data must be considered a "preview" of the FEMA-released products, and the information is subject to change as FEMA performs its final quality control on the mapping process. The final FEMA quality control process may result in some graphical clean-ups and will involve dividing the county into the typical FIRM panels.

**Where do I find the Flood Hazard Recovery Data after it is released on March 8th?**

Flood Hazard Recovery Data can be found on the internet at [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org). You may also call (713)722-7227 to find out more information.

**What if I do not have the ability to look up the Flood Hazard Recovery Data on the internet after it is released on March 8th?**

In addition to [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), Flood Hazard Recovery Data can be obtained by either visiting a local library that has internet capabilities or by calling (713)722-7227.

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**Is the Flood Hazard Recovery Data work map a Flood Insurance Rate Map?**

No. The Flood Hazard Recovery Data is being made available for informational purposes only. The information cannot be used for flood insurance purposes and is not intended to be used for regulatory purposes.

**Will my insurance rate change based on the Flood Hazard Recovery Data?**

No. The Flood Hazard Recovery Data is not a Flood Insurance Rate Map. Insurance rates will not change due to Flood Hazard Recovery Data, nor will any regulatory changes occur at this time. The Data is being provided for informational purposes only.

**Why does the initial release of Flood Hazard Recovery Data not include the entire county?**

Flood Hazard Recovery Data is being made available to the public as phases of work are being completed in each watershed. Not all watersheds are being completed at the same time. As a watershed is completed, the information will become available to the public. The project website, [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), will be updated every Monday with Data as it is completed. Over the next few months, Data for all of Harris County will become available.

**How do I know what watershed I live in?**

After the first release of Flood Hazard Recovery Data on March 8<sup>th</sup>, an individual can go to [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org) and type in their address and it will tell them what watershed they live in. The website will also let the user know if Flood Hazard Recovery Data is currently available for that watershed and provide useful links to information about the watershed they live in.

**How do I view the currently effective Flood Insurance Rate Map for my area?**

You can view your actual Flood Insurance Rate Map on FEMA's website at [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov). Follow the links to the Flood Map Store and follow the directions shown. There will also be an option to view the current floodplain information at the TSARP web site [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org) after the first release of Flood Hazard Recovery Data on March 8<sup>th</sup>, although the mapping will not have the same appearance as a FIRM (that is, it will not be presented as the traditional FEMA map panel).

**When will the preliminary Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps become available to the public?**

Preliminary DFIRMs are expected to be released to the public by FEMA in the late Spring, 2004.

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**What if I think there is an error in the Flood Hazard Recovery Data?**

The Flood Hazard Recovery Data is educational. It is not something that can be appealed. It will be combined with other information to help create the new FEMA preliminary Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps, scheduled to be released in late Spring of this year. If you believe you have found an error in this data, you are asked to keep that in mind when you review the preliminary Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps, which can be subject to a technical appeal. This information should be brought to the attention of your local floodplain administrator (your local governing agency, such as the building permit official) at that time.

**The Flood Hazard Recovery Data shows that I am now in the floodplain. Should I buy flood insurance now?**

You may qualify for better flood insurance rates if your policy is in place before the new Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps go into effect. Contact your insurance agent or company or contact the National Flood Insurance Program at 1-888-FLOOD29.

**The Flood Hazard Recovery Data shows that I am no longer in a floodplain. Am I still going to be required to have flood insurance by my lender?**

More than likely. The Flood Hazard Recovery Data work map is not a Flood Insurance Rate Map, nor is it a final product. The Data is being provided for educational purposes only. Certain types of mortgages have mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements based on federal law that require use of the official Flood Insurance Rate Maps. You should contact your lender for further information.

**The Flood Hazard Recovery Data shows that I am not in a floodplain. Do I need flood insurance?**

The District strongly recommends that everyone consider purchasing flood insurance, whether or not you are in a mapped floodplain. Harris County is an area of higher than normal flood risk due to our flat terrain and tropical climate. The mapped floodplain shows areas that are at a higher risk of flooding from an identified and studied stream. Some areas flood from intense localized rainfall when water flows overland trying to reach a channel, and, of course, extreme storm events can exceed the assumptions on which the mapping is based.

**The Flood Hazard Recovery Data shows that a property I'd like to purchase is in the floodplain. What should I do? Should I purchase it?**

This is not a decision that we can advise you on. Regulations and flood insurance rates are not affected by the Flood Hazard Recovery Data. The information is being provided to help people make informed decisions about where they work and live.

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**How can I find out more about flood insurance and who to purchase it from?**

You can contact any insurance agent or company that sells homeowners insurance, you can call 1-888-FLOOD29, or you can visit: [www.fema.gov/nfip/answe2d.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/nfip/answe2d.shtm).

**How do the base flood elevations on the Flood Hazard Recovery Data work map compare with the base flood elevations on the current Flood Insurance Rate Maps (or on my Elevation Certificate)?**

In general, you cannot directly compare the two elevation values. Ground elevations in the region have changed at different rates due to a phenomenon called subsidence, due mostly from pumping of groundwater from wells. The TSARP study collected all new ground information with a NASA-developed airborne laser system called LiDAR. All new floodplain (base flood) elevations are related to the new definition of the ground surface, accounting for subsidence. This is a fairly complex subject and you can find more information on this topic at the project website, [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org).

**How can I learn more about TSARP or general information about flooding?**

You can learn more about TSARP and the Flood Hazard Recovery Data at the TSARP website – [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), or by calling (713)722-7227 starting March 8<sup>th</sup>. The Harris County Flood Control District website ([www.hcfd.org](http://www.hcfd.org)) also has comprehensive information about the evolution of Harris County's drainage system, the history of flooding, and what is being done about it.

In addition, if a community or civic association desires a presentation regarding TSARP, they can request to schedule one on the project website, [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), or by calling (713) 684-4015.

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## **Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project Flood Hazard Recovery Data**

### **Engineering/Technical Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **How do I get a copy of the models used to determine the Flood Hazard Recovery Data for a watershed once that data is released on or after March 8<sup>th</sup>?**

You can request copies of the models and supporting data through the TSARP website at [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org). You can also call (713) 956-3074. The data can be mailed to you on CD or picked up at the District's office. Flood Hazard Recovery Data is being made available to the public as phases of work are being completed in each watershed. Not all watersheds are being completed at the same time. As a watershed is completed, the information will become available to the public. The project website, [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org), will be updated every Monday with data as it is completed. Over the next few months all of Harris County will be available.

#### **Can I get a profile/BFE for a certain location?**

The Flood Hazard Recovery Data work maps that are located on the website contain BFE's and you can download the profiles for each watershed that has been released. The Flood Hazard Recovery Data work maps and profiles are also included with the models on the Flood Hazard Recovery Data CD.

#### **How will LOMRs and CLOMRs be handled between now and when the maps are finalized?**

This Flood Hazard Recovery Data is not regulatory in nature and therefore does not affect the handling of LOMRs and CLOMRs. However, it would be prudent if engineers consider the new information and build projects to the most conservative data set. It may also be appropriate to perform modeling using both the effective and Flood Hazard Recovery Data (this will also apply once the preliminary DFIRMs are released by FEMA in late Spring).

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**How do I get benchmark data and elevations that are tied to the new models?**

Data on more than 1,500 benchmarks that were developed as part of this project are already available at [www.eng.hctx.net/website/benchmark/viewer.htm](http://www.eng.hctx.net/website/benchmark/viewer.htm). Be aware that the new benchmarks apply to the new information and cannot be used in conjunction with the currently effective FIRMs.

**Are there HEC-1 and HEC-2 versions of the models available for the Flood Hazard Recovery Data?**

HEC-1 and HEC-2 models are no longer supported by the US Army Corps of Engineers and therefore all the TSARP models are HEC-HMS and HEC-RAS models. When an engineer runs the TSARP models, it is important to use the correct version of the computer models. The correct versions are HEC-HMS 2.2.1 and HEC-RAS 3.0.1 and these programs are included on the TSARP Flood Hazard Recovery Data CD. For more information about HEC-HMS and HEC-RAS please visit the US Army Corps of Engineers website at [www.hec.usace.army.mil/default.html](http://www.hec.usace.army.mil/default.html).

**How do we file technical appeals if we believe that errors exist in the models?**

The study team is busy preparing information for the release of the preliminary DFIRMs and cannot entertain requests for any changes at this time. Once FEMA issues preliminary DFIRMs for all of Harris County, an appeals period and process will commence. At that time, technical appeals can be filed through your local floodplain administrator.

**What changes if any were made in how the floodplains were modeled compared to previous District modeling criteria?**

As a result of changes in technology, data, and models; several changes were made to the standard District and FEMA methods regarding how floodplains are modeled and mapped. There are 21 Technical White Papers that detail these changes. They can be found at [www.tsarp.org/tsarp\\_doc/techdocs.html](http://www.tsarp.org/tsarp_doc/techdocs.html).

**How will these models be maintained in the future?**

The District is working with FEMA to develop a pilot program that will review and maintain models allowing for more timely updates than is the current practice. The District is committed to making sure these valuable tools remain useful for many years to come.

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