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## **ENGINEERING REPORT DETAILS DIFFERENT TROPICAL STORM ALLISON DAMAGE SCENARIOS**

### *New Floodplain Maps to Be Introduced This Summer for Public Comment*

HOUSTON (February 24, 2003) – The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Harris County Flood Control District today released a Tropical Storm Allison Event Analysis Report, an in-depth engineering examination of the flooding that occurred in eleven of Harris County’s major bayous during Allison including an assessment of the data gathering procedures, computer models and engineering tools used by the District.

While the Report will be of interest to the engineering community, portions were developed specifically for the general public. In particular, the Report contains maps to demonstrate what could have occurred in Harris County had Allison’s path been different and to provide educational information regarding the area’s natural and historical risks of flooding.

The agencies prepared the report as part of the Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Project (TSARP), a multi-year effort by FEMA and the District to scientifically assess the flooding risks for the major sources of flooding throughout Harris County. This countywide risk information will be released for public comment this summer in the form of new Flood Insurance Rate Maps, commonly referred to as floodplain maps.

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### Storm Path Scenario Maps

Tropical Storm Allison caused more damage than any other tropical storm in US history. In Harris County, 22 deaths were reported, over 3,000 homes were destroyed and more than 73,000 residences were damaged. Flooding occurred over approximately 380 square miles of the county causing approximately \$5.5 billion in total damages.

As bad as this was, the damage could have been worse. To underscore this point FEMA and the District shifted the heart of Allison's path over other locations, including those that are more densely developed than those where the worst flooding occurred. The maps of these different scenarios reveal that:

- If the intense rainfall witnessed by the central portion of Harris County had occurred over Barker and Addicks Reservoirs, record flood heights exceeding previous records by five to eight feet would have occurred, exceeding the limits of government owned land in the reservoirs by as much as 2,000 acres.
- Had Allison's heaviest rainfall occurred over White Oak, Brays, and Buffalo Bayous, flooding would have exceeded the predicted one percent (100-year) floodplain by 131%, 170%, and 176% respectively.

### Historical Flooding Maps

In the wake of Tropical Storm Allison, many residents of Harris County might expect flooding to be a rare, or once in a lifetime, phenomenon. Put simply, nothing could be further from the truth.

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To demonstrate this point, the Report contains maps of four of Houston's oldest developed watersheds: Brays, Greens, Hunting, and White Oak. Transposed on these maps is the estimated one percent (100-year) floodplain that may have existed in 1915 (before major development occurred) as well as the current FEMA one percent floodplain of that area.

The results indicate that while the areas are still subject to flooding, flood damage reduction projects have reduced the area subject to flooding by percentages ranging from 35% to over 50% for the four watersheds.

### New Floodplain Maps

Mike Talbott, Director of the Harris County Flood Control District, noted that the Report is timely given the agency's ongoing work with FEMA to update Harris County's floodplain maps as part of TSARP.

"The information in this report shows that our engineering methods work well and that flooding in Harris County has been successfully reduced over the years, but there will always be some level of flood risk associated with living in this region. Hopefully, this Event Analysis Report will call attention to these facts and encourage the community to attend public meetings when the new floodplain maps are introduced this summer so they can better understand their individual flood risk," Talbott said.

Frank Pagano, Director of FEMA's Insurance and Mitigation Division, stressed that while it is always wise to hold a National Flood Insurance Program policy, an incentive exists for property owners to purchase a flood insurance policy now if they do not already own one.

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“For many, the new floodplain maps will have little to no impact on their flood zone designation and associated policy rate, and for some their status may actually improve. However, it is possible that the new maps will create boundaries that would cause the basis for policy rates to rise or require a home owner to purchase a policy for the first time. For that reason a ‘grandfather’ provision exists for existing policy holders that may allow a more beneficial rate once the new maps take effect,” Pagano commented.

#### For Additional Information

FEMA and the District hope that today’s announcement will spark additional public interest in TSARP. To date, more than 50 public meetings and presentations have been held on the topic and many more are planned.

A civic, cultural, or business organization desiring a presentation on TSARP and how it will benefit Harris County should contact the TSARP office at 281-579-4656.

A copy of the Tropical Storm Allison Event Analysis Report can be found on [www.tsarp.org](http://www.tsarp.org).

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