

# Local

## Study of flooded home areas could be of use

People with homes seriously damaged by high water across Central Texas may like this bit of advice: a Texas A&M researcher says government officials should refrain from helping victims rebuild in areas with a high risk of flooding, but should purchase those homes at a fair market price.

"It is extremely important for city, state and federal officials to fully evaluate the cause and effect of flooding and damage before a single solution is applied," said Dr. Christopher Mathewson, a geology professor and authority on hydrology.

He explained that flood problems are a complex mixture of both land and water management.

Simply clearing some small vegetation along urban creeks and rivers and maintaining the channel beds could reduce the flood risk to many homes that would otherwise be damaged, Mathewson said.

"Homes that can't be economically protected — both from a financial and environmental standpoint — may be better off being purchased with public funds at a fair price."

Besides easing the cost of flood recovery, such a plan would allow homeowners to retain most of the investment they had made, Mathewson said. "It would be a shame if flood victims couldn't afford to move to a safer location because they can't sell their homes at fair market value," he said.

Mathewson also said nearby landowners could be given the option of buying the easily flooded lots with the understanding that no structures be placed on them.

He says the floodplains are too valuable a resource to abandon. They can be used as parks, landscaped greenery, large backyards, parking lots, outside storage areas that can be cleared on short notice, or other resources that would not be damaged by rising water but not as a safe place to live.

It is not economically feasible to provide complete protection for every conceivable flood like the ones that have killed 22 people in Central Texas since Memorial Day, Mathewson said, but an integrated and water management program can lessen the damage.

"We often forget that for any flood for which a dam is designed, there will always be another of greater intensity," said Mathewson, author of a new book, "Engineering Geology," which includes portions on flooding.

He said rains that fall on rapidly developing urban areas today can cause high water where it was never a problem yesterday.

"We can demand improved runoff from shopping centers, such as housing developments and shopping centers, but we refuse to be responsible for that

water once it enters the creek area because the creeks belong to nature," Mathewson said.

More streets, gutters, curbs, parking lots and slanted roofs boost runoff from heavy rains while improved sewage systems increase the rate at which water is dumped into city rivers and streams, leading to flooding, he said.

He suggests that shopping centers install smaller pipes, and that the outer limits of the parking lot be designed to hold a maximum of six inches of rain water during the heaviest downpours, decreasing the rate at which water enters urban creeks.

Other engineering designs such as flat-topped roofs capable of holding and supporting the weight of some rain could help reduce damage, while providing extra energy conservation against hot Texas summers, he said.

A 24-hour flood warning system similar to those used for tornadoes would allow time to clear parking lots, storage areas or objects of value in flood-prone regions, Mathewson said. Clearing a few bottlenecks in streams could drop the high-water mark a few feet at low financial and ecological costs to the cities and still eliminate much of the damage.

Dr. Kenneth Brundidge, a professor of meteorology at Texas A&M, said the heavy rains plaguing the Hill Country are the result of routine storm systems that stalled. Their rain, he said, was triggered by an outside force like a cold front.

"The rain is produced in the warm, moist air from the Gulf that moves inland. The rain is released, however, by some other disturbance acting on the moist air, such as a low-pressure area or a cold front passing through," he explained.

Despite the heavy rains, the storm systems are not unusual at all for this year, said Brundidge.

"This is much like the wet spring we had last year just before the record heat wave and dry spell began," he said.

Records from the State Climatologist's Office at Texas A&M show that in 1980, the month of May was the wettest in 25 years for some portions of the state even though one of the worst dry spells since the '50s began a few weeks later.

Other documents from the Climatologist's Office indicate water levels in major Texas reservoirs had already reached a total of nearly 25 million acre-feet by late April, and the current flooding is expected to add to the total.

During the 1970s, Texas lakes have held a high of about 28 million acre-feet while the total conservation level for major reservoirs is approximately 32 million acre-feet.

## Students seek employment

### Jobs cut college costs

As federal financial aid for college and university students dries up, students may be looking for part-time employment to make ends meet while getting education.

At Texas A&M University, more than 6,000 students already participate annually in on-campus work programs. Student financial aid officials report that jobs are plentiful — if the student is willing to work and isn't too picky about the kind of work he or she does.

This year the on-campus payroll to student workers was more than \$3 million, said Clair Fink of the Texas A&M student financial aid office, and that does not include salaries paid to some 2,000 graduate assistants and research assistants.

In addition to the on-campus jobs, the Bryan-College Station community — which is experiencing one of the greatest growth patterns in the state — offers a plethora of job opportunities. Many are posted on campus bulletin boards and some are never filled.

A student's ability to work is affected by class schedule, grade average and desire, said Fink.

Those who work for the University receive at least \$3.64 an hour.

About 20 percent of the on-campus jobs are short

term, lasting only a few days, Fink said. These include handling registration cards and working in the bookstore during the opening days of each semester, processing mail-outs for various research projects and distributing the yearbook.

Long-term jobs include work in the University's dining halls, which employ about 200 students each semester, intramural athletics, which uses about 300 students for officials and referees for various sports, and clerical positions in almost all campus departments.

"The jobs range from milking cows to parking lot attendant to data processor," Fink said.

In addition to the normal job offers posted on financial aid office bulletin boards, students meeting financial need criteria may participate in a work-study program.

Texas A&M has \$300,000 in funds for this program this year, Fink said.

Under the program, the University pays 80 percent of the student worker's salary and the employing department pays 20 percent in fringe benefits.

The average student works about 10 to 15 hours a week, Fink estimated, and earns from \$600 to \$1,000 during the year.

## A&M housing, sprinklers lauded

Two innovative programs to reduce campus operating costs have resulted in recognition for Texas A&M University by the National Association of College and University Business Officers and the U.S. Steel Foundation.

Texas A&M's centralized, radio-controlled landscaping irrigation system which uses a radio signal to activate lawn sprinklers

throughout the 5,000-acre campus was cited for the University's innovative use of movable wall dividers in married student apartments to allow tenants to determine interior arrangement and use of floor space.

The movable wall dividers also permit the apartments to be adapted to accommodate four single students or a married couple. The estimated savings are \$53,000 a year.

Texas A&M is one of 29 winners in the sixth annual Cost Reduction Incentive Awards Program sponsored by the college and university business officers organization and U.S. Steel.

Last year the same group cited Texas A&M for the innovative modular dormitory construction concept.

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