

WATER *for the* WOODLANDS

PROVIDED TO RESIDENTS BY THE WOODLANDS JOINT POWERS AGENCY

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Service agency unites The Woodlands water districts

Ever wonder who is in charge of getting clean water in to your home, and the not-so-clean, or "wastewater" out?

Many residents in The Woodlands are aware that they live in a municipal utility district (or MUD), and that the MUD is responsible for providing water, sewer and drainage services for their neighborhood. They pay bi-monthly bills for those services, and pay property taxes once a year to the MUD.

What may come as a surprise is that the 11 MUDs that serve The Woodlands are united under one management organization - The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency (WJPA). The WJPA performs all customer-service duties, on a day-to-day and month-to-month basis, for The Woodlands MUD 2 and Montgomery County MUDs 6, 7, 36, 39, 40, 46, 47, 60, 67 and The Woodlands Metro Center MUD.

"The customer interacts with the WJPA staff when they need help with water, wastewater collection and stormwater services," said Jim Stinson, The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency's general manager. "When residents call for service, they call The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency."

Those services include:

- Maintaining superior water quality
- Providing optimal operating pressure
- Water/sewer pipeline repair and maintenance
- Storm water drainage issues
- All customer service functions
- Annual MUD tax statements

Stinson said the primary function of the MUDs is to pay for, develop and maintain the water, sewer and drainage (or stormwater) infrastructure within the individual districts.

The San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA) provides wastewater treatment services and wholesale water supply for the 11 MUDs through its Woodlands Division, which operates three wastewater treatment plants, three water plants and 30 water wells.

Stinson said The Woodlands MUDs have not always been united under the WJPA umbrella. The agency evolved in the early stages of development as an efficient means to provide water, sewer and drainage services for The Woodlands.

"There was a need to oversee and manage the various MUDs operations in a uniform and cost-effective way," Stinson said. ■

Lone Star District searches for water supply solutions

The unprecedented growth and development in all four corners of Montgomery County has many people in the water industry putting their heads together to ensure that the county's underground water resources are there for future generations.

And the time to start conserving that groundwater -- the sole source of potable water for Montgomery County residents at this time -- is now.

"If we are not proactive and do not implement conservation measures, we will not have enough water for the future," said Kathy Turner Jones, general manager of the Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District. "We are working to solve that problem."

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District was created through a bill passed in the 77th Texas Legislature, and confirmed by Montgomery County voters in a November 2001 election. The goal of the District is to preserve, conserve and protect Montgomery County's groundwater sources for future generations.

The District's nine-member board is charged with developing a plan to reduce groundwater use in the county so that the underground water supplies are able to replenish each year. Montgomery County residents' groundwater use needs to be held at 64,000-acre-feet, or approximately 21 billion gallons of water per year to maintain sustainable yields.

Jones said in three years water usage is expected to exceed the 64,000-acre-feet threshold by 20 percent, and by 2040 almost 140 percent.

"The Lone Star GCD board realizes that we are going to have to reduce the dependency on

groundwater and meet our water needs through other means," Jones said. "New strategies, including the utilization of surface water supplies, aggressive conservation and water reuse programs, are going to be necessary."

In December, the board adopted Phase 1 of a District Regulatory Plan (DRP). The cornerstone of that plan, said Jones, is that by Jan. 1, 2015, 30 percent of water used in Montgomery County should come from Lake Conroe.

The Lone Star GCD is working with the San Jacinto River Authority (SJRA), which owns one-third of the water rights to Lake Conroe, to maximize the cost-effectiveness of a regional surface water distribution system for water providers in Montgomery County by over-converting high density areas, such as The Woodlands and the City of Conroe.

Jones said in order to meet that goal, treatment plants and pipelines to serve Montgomery County water users will have to be built, which takes time. The Lone Star GCD and SJRA are almost finished with a preliminary transmission routing alignment study, which will help determine where those pipelines would go.

What does this all mean to Montgomery County residents? Water rates are going up to pay for the surface water and infrastructure needed to get it to homes and businesses to ensure the water needs of our rapidly-growing county.

"In this area we have grown accustomed to cheap and plentiful water," Jones said. "It makes sense to start implementing water



conservation measures throughout our community now."

"We anticipate that we could achieve another 10 to 15 percent reduction in our groundwater use through conservation," Jones said, and commented that it is possible that state laws will be passed imposing aggressive conservation mandates across the state. Those could include water-saving faucets and appliances, landscape irrigation limitations, and public education.

"This (pending water shortage) is not just affecting Montgomery County - it is affecting cities and counties state-wide," Jones said. "The number of Texans is expected to increase by 40 percent between 2000 and 2020, and the population will increase much more in the faster-growing cities."

The Lone Star Groundwater Conservation District board meets the second Tuesday of every month in the Board Room at the District's office, 207 W. Phillips, Suite 300, Conroe. Board meetings are open to the public, and visitors are always welcome.

For more information, go to www.lonestargcd.org or call 936-494-3436. ■

Rain sensors can solve overwatering problems and save water and money

With automatic timers on most underground sprinkler systems, it is easy to forget to turn off those systems during rainstorms or extended periods of rainy weather.

However, all too often sprinkler systems in The Woodlands are running full force while it is raining. Water is wasted and lawns are over-watered.

Officials with The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency, the entity that provides management services for all 11 water districts in The Woodlands, say over-watering is the most frequent mistake The Woodlands' homeowners make in lawn care.

Too much water promotes a shallow root system, which causes grass and plants to become vulnerable to hot/dry weather.

The demand for water in The Woodlands is increasing. Water use during the summer is three to eight times that of winter use. The Woodlands water system is designed to meet peak demand, and much of the water is wasted. If an average family of four uses more than 40,000 gallons of water during a 60-day summer billing period (with average rainfall), they are irrigating too much.

Residents and business owners in The Woodlands are urged to install rain sensors, or rain shut-off devices, on automatic sprinkler systems.

Sensors detect moisture/rainfall and automatically shut off when the trigger amount is met, said Mike Mooney, operations manager for The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency (WJPA). They are important because they save water, and in turn, save residents money.

Mooney said the cost savings could be substantial during a wet year. "Our goal is to have all resident and commercial businesses install a rain shut-off device," said Mooney. "Basically, we think the rain sensors are just the prudent thing to do. The aquifer (that supplies The Woodlands with water) is being over-pumped, and whether the device saves 10 gallons or 10,000 gallons we think it is worth it."

The problem with over-watering

Lawns irrigated three or four times a week, or everyday, cause grasses and plants to develop shallow root systems that cannot survive without frequent watering. During drought conditions, or in hot weather, these "addicted" plants and grasses wilt quickly. And, if grass is cut to a height of one or two inches, the problem is compounded because the top few inches of soil dries out quickly in hot weather, and plants and grasses are further starved for water.

The solution

The easiest way to correct the problem caused by over-watering is to gradually reduce the frequency of watering. With less frequent watering, root systems push deeper into the soil looking for water.

The goal is to irrigate deeply once per week applying approximately 1" of water. Using the cycle/soak method on the irrigation controller, water will penetrate 4 to 6 inches into the soil rather than running into the street.

The WJPA has a list of approved rain sensor devices and approved installation contractors.



What is a rain sensor?

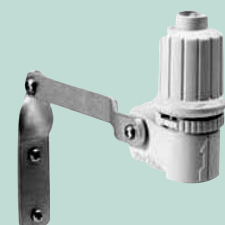
A rain sensor is a small device wired to the common line on an automatic sprinkler system designed to override the automatic watering cycle when a certain level of rainfall is detected. The shut-off level is usually set at 1/4-inch of rain.

The sensors do not affect the sprinkler system's overall timing device. Once the collection dish dries out, the automatic timer kicks in.

The three primary benefits of installing a rain sensor are:

- Cost savings -- the sprinkler system shuts off when adequate rainfall is received, thus saving money on water bills.
- System savings-- there is less wear and tear on the sprinkler system because it only runs when necessary.
- Lawn protection -- reduces potential damage to the lawn caused by over-watering.

For more information, contact The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency at 281-367-1271 or visit www.wjpa.org.





What do you know about your MUD taxes?

Statements reflecting the 2006 tax rates were mailed to all eleven Woodlands MUDs in October. The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency, the entity that provides operational services for the 11 MUDs, sends out those tax statements and collects taxes on behalf of the MUDs.

All MUD tax rates can be broken down into two components: debt service and the maintenance and operations (M&O) rate. Combined, those two rates make up the total tax rate listed on MUD tax bills.

Debt Service

"The debt service rate is the portion used to pay off bonds sold to install or purchase water, wastewater and drainage facilities," said Jim Stinson, The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency's general manager.

Stinson said the debt service portion of the tax rate decreases as a MUD pays off outstanding bond debt. However, that depends on the size of the MUD, the number of bond issues required to pay off the debt, and the overall debt amount carried by the MUD. He said MUDs 6 and 36 have paid off all bonds issued by the districts.

Maintenance & Operations

"Generally, as systems get older and debt service goes down, it is not uncommon for the maintenance and operations costs to go up," Stinson said. That Maintenance and Operations rate (along with revenue from water and sewer rates) funds the budget required to maintain and operate water, wastewater and drainage facilities in a MUD.

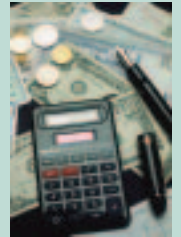
Stinson said some MUDs are able to ward off a tax hike - even if there is an increase in maintenance and operations costs - through annexation of property into the water district. With costs spread across a larger area with a diversified base, the tax rate could hold steady or even decrease.

Tax Information

Each of the eleven MUD boards determines their tax rate in September, and that rate goes into effect in October, the beginning of each MUD's budget year. The Woodlands Joint Powers Agency has a tax assessor-collector in house to answer questions and provide information about tax bills, which began accruing penalties and interest February 1, 2007 if not paid.

For more information about the MUD tax rates, or to contact the WJPA's tax assessor-collector, go to www.wjpa.org or call 281-367-1271, ext. 5. ■

2005 & 2006 Tax Rates and Percent of Decrease...



2005 Rate	2006 Rate	Percent
0.25	0.21	-16.00%



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Visit our comprehensive web site to pay your water bills, learn about critical water issues, and find information about using our water resources more efficiently.

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