



## Harris County Appraisal District News Release

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### HCAD Warns Homeowners to Beware of Exemption “Assistance” Offers

**Houston** — The Harris County Appraisal District (HCAD) is urging property owners to be alert during this “Season of Giving” for mail from businesses and individuals who will offer to file homestead exemption paperwork for a fee.

The solicitation letters offer to help residents either file a homestead exemption, a homestead designation or recover money that may be owed to them because they have not filed for a homestead exemption. Terms that are frequently used include:

- Designation of Homestead
- Homestead Exemption Fee, or
- Unclaimed Government Funds

Typically, the companies prepare a simple exemption application, then claim a significant portion of the amount that is due the homeowner. Once the homeowner has signed on, many of these firms are quick to sue in small claims court if the unfortunate individual refuses to pay.

Many homeowners have complained to HCAD after being misled by these letters and door-to-door solicitations.

Roland Altinger, HCAD’s chief appraiser, warns homeowners who receive these types of solicitations to be extremely careful and check with the appraisal district or an attorney before responding to the offer.

“There is absolutely no charge for a homeowner to file their own homestead exemption application with the appraisal district,” Altinger said. “The exemption forms can be filled out digitally on our website, [www.hcad.org](http://www.hcad.org) , or submitted through the HCAD app.”

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Property owners can also download the forms for mailing or pick them up from the appraisal district at 13013 Northwest Freeway in Houston. The homeowner will need to have an updated Texas driver's license that matches the address of the property to submit with the application.

The homestead exemption is the single most important tax saver available to homeowners. A homeowner is eligible to apply if they owned and occupied the home as their primary residence on Jan. 1 of the year for which application is made, and neither the applicant nor their spouse has claimed a residence homestead exemption on any other property, regardless of where that property is located.

A qualified property owner may apply up to two years after the date taxes for the year of the application become delinquent, which is usually Feb. 1.

If an exemption is granted for a prior year for which taxes have been paid, the tax offices will issue a refund for the overpayment to either the property owner or the lender managing the escrow account. The refund process can take between 60 to 120 days.

More information about these solicitations can be found at [www.hcad.org](http://www.hcad.org) under Help > Consumer Alerts.

### **About HCAD**

The Harris County Appraisal District is a political subdivision of the State of Texas established in 1980 for the purpose of discovering and appraising property for ad valorem tax purposes for each taxing unit within the boundaries of the district. The district has approximately 1.8 million parcels of property to assess each year with a total market value of approximately \$669 billion. The appraisal district in Harris County is the largest in Texas, serving approximately 500 taxing units, and one of the largest appraisal districts in the United States. For further information, visit [www.hcad.org](http://www.hcad.org).

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