

DISASTERS IN TEXAS

46 minutes between alert, evacuation

Local agencies face safety challenges as Texans seek to rebuild in floodplains

By Maryam Ahmed
STAFF WRITER

After devastating flash floods across Central Texas this month flattened homes and commercial properties along roaring rivers, resulting in more than 130 deaths, experts warn that cities and counties are limited in how they can regulate development across the state's floodplains.

With many residents who lost their homes in the Fourth of July weekend floods seeking to rebuild, there are concerns about whether local gov-

ernments can adequately protect people from future extreme weather.

The most effective way to guard against flood risks is to not build within Texas floodplains, or land that's susceptible to being inundated by floodwater. About 5.2 million Texans, or 17% of the state's population, live in floodplains, according to the Texas Water Development Board. According to an article by Urban Institute senior fellow Andrew Rumbach, land in the floodplains is relatively cheap. As a result, that

Rebuild continues on A7



Jay Janner/Austin American-Statesman
Eric Herr, a volunteer with Search and Support San Antonio, works last week along the Guadalupe River in Ingram after the Hill Country flooding.

INSIDE

Couple with Houston ties killed in flooding during vacation trip to Hill Country. **A6**

Timeline of events at Camp Mystic still being determined, family says

By Peggy O'Hare
STAFF WRITER

The owner of Camp Mystic received a National Weather Service alert on his phone warning of imminent "life threatening flash flooding" along the Guadalupe River, but camp personnel did not begin evacuating children until at least 46 minutes later.

Twenty-five campers and two counselors died early on the morning of July 4 when floodwaters barreled through the Christian girls' camp, a beloved, 99-year-old retreat in Kerr

County. The camp's owner and executive director, Dick Eastland, 70, died while trying to rescue campers.

The weather service sent the flash flood warning at 1:14 a.m. that morning as torrential rains pummeled the Texas Hill Country. Counselors and other camp personnel began evacuating campers between 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m., said Jeff Carr, a spokesman for the Eastland family, whose members have run the camp for generations.

Carr said the time frame

Camp continues on A7

BIRDS OF A FEATHER



Victor Gonzales rides his bicycle through a flock of seagulls last week along the Seawall in Galveston.

"It's summertime in Galveston. This is what we do," Gonzales said. The next couple of days will provide plenty of opportunity to follow Gonzales' example, with mostly sunny skies and highs in the mid-90s.

Weather, B14.

BRETT COOMER/HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Over 800 teachers left HISD in 2024-25

Departures have increased by 48% since state takeover

By Anastasia Goodwin and Nusaiba Mizan
STAFF WRITERS

More than 3,220 employees, including at least 840 teachers, left Houston ISD from August 2024 through May, exacerbating the higher turnover rates that have plagued the district since the state's June 2023 takeover of the district.

A Houston Chronicle analysis found the average number of yearly teacher departures rose by 48% in the first two years of the state takeover compared to the five years prior.

Houston ISD commented much of the departures are due to the district's higher expectations for instruction and employee performance.

"HISD is undergoing a comprehensive transformation to ensure every student receives high-quality instruction. That requires having the best possible instructor in every classroom," HISD commented Thursday. "We are intentionally raising the bar for all employees, including teachers. That shift has led to more rigorous evaluations and accountability. As a result, many of the departures reflect a necessary and deliberate change in our workforce to better serve students. The Dis-

Teachers continues on A8

Trump's megabill creating new roadblocks for immigrants

By Julián Aguilar

Houston immigrants are already feeling sticker shock from President Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill" as they face steep fees in asylum cases with no clear way to pay them.

Attorneys and advocates say the fees are a new tactic by the Trump administration to make the process of seeking asylum or other forms of legal presence in the United States out of reach for immigrants.

For a family of three from Cuba who sought asylum in Houston earlier this year, a failure to pay a hefty fee that is now

required for some asylum cases led an immigration judge to deny their requests to stay in the country.

"I opened up my email and I received a rejected filing notice," the family's immigration attorney, John Dutton, told the Houston Chronicle. "The file was rejected in immigration court because — and this is brand new — it does not include the proper fees."

Dutton said the law is so new, there's no clear process in place to pay the immigration fees for those who can afford it.

Dutton filed a motion with a Houston immigra-



Elizabeth Conley/Houston Chronicle
Protesters wave flags from Mexico and El Salvador as they line Dunlavy Street bridge during nationwide ICE protests last month.

tion judge to reconsider a previously issued order of removal, a somewhat routine filing in the asylum application process.

Included among nearly a dozen reasons a judge can reject the filing on the two-page rejection letter Dutton received was a box marked "Other."

It reads: "Motion does not include proper fees, proof of payment of the proper fees, or an appropriate and complete fee waiver request form where applicable." The form cited the Big, Beautiful Bill signed into law by Trump.

The application process used to be free, Dut-

ton said. The family's lawyer said he couldn't anticipate the fee mandate coming so soon as Trump just signed the legislation on July 4.

"I pulled up the Big, Beautiful Bill and it is freaking big," he said. "I found the section on filing a motion to reopen our motion to reconsider. The fee for that is not less than \$900. So, this family will have to pay \$900 for each application. That's \$2,700."

Dutton said had the judge reviewed the family's request, he would likely have denied them. That's expected as immi-

Asylum continues on A8