

SPEAK OUT!

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OPINIONS

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FEMA assessments should be done, and done right

When the floodwaters of the swollen Brazos River subsided in Hurricane Harvey's wake, thousands of Brazoria County residents were left the unfortunate task of cleaning up soggy properties. For some, it was the second year in a row the river invaded their homes.

Now, if they hope to mitigate the risk of future flooding, they face the expensive chore of coming into compliance with up-to-date elevation standards. That makes it all the more ridiculous the one federal agency that could open up thousands of dollars in grant money to help them afford it hasn't visited the majority of damaged properties.

OUR VIEWPOINT

Our Viewpoint reflects the majority opinion of The Facts editorial board, which includes Yvonne Mintz, Michael Morris, Klark Byrd and Dale Dimitri.

Earlier this week, Brazoria County Floodplain Director Joe Ripple said Federal Emergency Management Agency contractors assessed about 2,000 of the approximately 13,000 properties affected by the flood. Of those assessed, he said, FEMA determined just 303 met the criteria of "substantially damaged," meaning more than half of the property's value was washed away.

Ripple believes — and it's no

stretch to agree with him — the true number of "substantially damaged" homes is likely in the thousands.

That means FEMA is potentially leaving a large number of property owners high and dry for the financial assistance they need to meet elevation standards.

This really comes as no surprise for those who have dealt with FEMA before. Just last week after the county received a check of \$175,000 from the state to put toward Harvey debris cleanup costs, County Judge Matt Sebesta said, "We haven't gotten money back from the federal government for infrastructure damage from the 2015 floods,

much less 2016 and 2017. It's going to be years as we go through this."

FEMA spokesman Bob Howard told us Brazoria County could ask for more help from the agency. He said, "FEMA is in regular contact with communities regarding substantial damage and other floodplain issues and is committed to providing service to these communities. This support is available, so if a community feels that more data needs to be collected, FEMA is able to provide additional support."

Sorry, FEMA, but we agree with Ripple in that all the assessments should be completed and done correctly

the first time. Calling the agency back to an area where it's already been is a waste of taxpayer dollars and local officials' and property owners' time.

The unfortunate side effect of FEMA's inadequate job is that thousands of local property owners might be under the impression they don't need to elevate their homes. That's a costly gamble, especially given recent trends.

It's beyond time for FEMA to finish the job, and it might as well do it now while the waters are calm.

Today's editorial was written by Klark Byrd, assistant managing editor for The Facts.