

New Requirements for Homestead Applications

The recent session of the Texas Legislature imposed new standards of mandatory disclosure for those property owners who apply for any one of several kinds of homestead exemptions starting September 1.

In order to receive a homestead exemption for property tax purposes, applicants must now provide a copy of their Texas driver's license or Texas state-issued identification card and a copy of their vehicle registration receipt with their application for a homestead exemption.

Moreover, the addresses shown on each of the documents must be the same as the address for which the homestead exemption is sought, according to Freestone County Chief Appraiser Bud Black.

Those who do not own a vehicle will be required to submit a notarized affidavit certifying that fact and provide a copy of a current bill received from a utility company. The address on the utility bill must be the same as the address on the application for a homestead exemption.

"The Legislature has closed loopholes in disclosure that allowed some citizens to obtain homestead exemptions on more than one property," Black said. "The Legislature has also authorized central appraisal districts to gain access to the database of the Texas Department of Public Safety so that differences in addresses reported for driver's license and property tax reasons can be audited electronically."

The new requirement that takes effect on September 1 is required for any one of the several ways property owners can qualify for a residential property homestead. These include the following:

- General residential exemption
- Over-65 exemption
- Disability exemption
- 100% disabled veterans exemption
- Extension of exemption for a surviving spouse

Each of the exemptions cited above has additional requirements for qualification. However, the common standard is that all such applicants must provide the additional documentation as noted before regarding driver's license, Texas issued identification card, motor vehicle registration, and utility billing receipt.

For those seeking homestead exemption status on a manufactured home, applicants must also provide documentation as noted below:

- Statement of ownership and location issued by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, OR
- A copy of the purchase contract or payment receipt that the applicant is the purchaser of the manufactured home. If this is not available, the owner must present a sworn affidavit stating that:
 - a. The applicant is the owner of the manufactured home
 - b. The seller of the manufactured home did not provide the applicant with a purchase contract, and
 - c. The applicant could not locate the seller after making a good faith effort

Applications dated and submitted to the appraisal district by August 31, 2011 will be processed under the pre-September 1 guidelines.