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Comptroller's Office Encourages Homeowners to Take Advantage of Homestead Exemptions

One of the easiest ways a homeowner can lower his or her property tax bill in 2013 is to file a homestead exemption. A homestead is generally the house and land used as the owner's principal residence on Jan. 1 of the tax year.

Homestead exemptions reduce the appraised value of your home and, as a result, lower your property taxes. To apply for an exemption on your residence homestead, contact the Lamar County Appraisal District.

Available homestead exemptions include:

- **School taxes:** All homeowners may receive a \$25,000 homestead exemption for school taxes.
- **County taxes:** If a county collects a special tax for farm-to-market roads or flood control, a homeowner may receive a \$3,000 homestead exemption for this tax.
- **Age and disability exemptions:** Individuals 65 or older or disabled as defined by law may qualify for a \$10,000 homestead exemption for school taxes, in addition to the \$25,000 exemption available to all homeowners. Also, any taxing unit may offer a local optional exemption of at least \$3,000 for any taxpayer age 65 or older and/or disabled. Older or disabled homeowners do not need to own their homes on Jan. 1 to qualify for the \$10,000 homestead exemption. They qualify as soon as they turn 65 or become disabled.
- Taxing units may offer a **local option exemption** based on a percentage of a home's appraised value. Any taxing unit can exempt up to 20 percent of the value of each qualified homestead. No matter what percentage of value the taxing unit adopts, the dollar value of the exemption must be at least \$5,000.
- **Partial disabled veteran exemptions:** The law provides partial exemptions for any property owned by veterans who are disabled, spouses and survivors of deceased disabled veterans and spouses and survivors of military personnel who died on active duty. The amount of exemption is determined according to the percentage of service-connected disability.
- **100% Residence Homestead Exemption for Disabled Veterans:** A disabled veteran who receives from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (1) 100 percent disability compensation due to a service-connected disability; and (2) a rating of 100 percent disabled or of individual employability is entitled to an exemption from taxation of the total appraised value of the veteran's residence homestead. Surviving spouses are also eligible upon the veteran's death with certain restrictions. The residence homestead application must be filed if this exemption is claimed.

Recently passed legislation now requires homeowners to provide proof of residency for a new property tax exemption beginning Sept. 1, 2011. This new requirement does not apply to homeowners who already have homestead exemptions.

For more details on homestead exemptions, contact the Lamar County Appraisal District at 903-785-7822. Or contact the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division at (800) 252-9121 and press "2" to access the menu and then press "1" to contact the Information Services Team. The homestead exemption application is available online at:

<http://www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/taxforms/50-114.pdf>.