

Homestead Exemptions Reduce Property Tax Bills

Homeowners can reduce their property tax bills in 2011 by taking advantage of homestead exemptions offered by counties, cities, school districts and other local taxing units. To apply for an exemption on your residence homestead, contact the Colorado County Appraisal District.

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 thus lower your property taxes.

Available homestead exemptions include:

- **School taxes:** All homeowners may receive a \$15,000 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 may qualify for a \$10,000 homestead exemption for school taxes, in addition to the \$15,000 exemption available to all homeowners. Also, any taxing unit may offer a local optional exemption of at least \$3,000 for taxpayers age 65 or older and/or disabled. Older or disabled homeowners do not need to own their homes on Jan. 1 to qualify for these special homestead exemptions. 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 a determination of individual unemployability from the Veterans Affairs is entitled to an exemption from taxation of the total appraised value of the veteran's residence homestead. This benefit does not accrue to the surviving spouse upon the veteran's death.

Homeowners may also qualify for a limit on taxes. A tax freeze, or ceiling, for school taxes is a benefit for homeowners when they turn 65 or become disabled. The elderly or disabled homeowner's school property taxes cannot increase above the amount of tax paid on that home in the first year the homeowner receives the 65 and older homestead exemption, unless the homeowner improves or adds to the house or makes an improvement because of a disaster.

In addition to the school tax freeze, counties, cities and junior college districts may also opt to offer a tax freeze for the elderly or disabled homeowners. Each taxing unit's governing body may vote to grant the freeze, or the citizens of a taxing unit may petition for an election on granting the freeze.

For further details on homestead exemptions that can lower your property taxes, contact the Colorado County Appraisal District at (979) 732-8222. Or contact the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division at (800) 252-9121, ext. 2, or visit the Comptroller's website at www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/.