

Is your home ready for El Niño?

The time to start preparing is now.

You know El Niño is on its way. But you're not sure when it's due – or how to prepare for it. You're not alone. Most homeowners in drought-stricken Southern California are in the same boat (pardon the expression). Follow this checklist to help you prepare for this late-winter through early-spring phenomenon that can have all sorts of effects on weather, including heavy rains and flooding throughout our region.

Clean out rain gutters & downspouts:

Do this before and after the first rain to make sure these areas are unobstructed and can channel water off the roof. Look for any breaks. Make sure gutters are tight against the roofline. Seal any holes from cables and other wires that penetrate exterior walls.

Check for roof leaks: Look for damaged, loose, or missing shingles that could leak during winter storms. Scan the roof with binoculars if you don't have a ladder. On roofs that are flat or surfaced with asphalt and pebbles, rake or blow off fall leaves and pine needles, which retain moisture. An inch of rain adds up to **600 gallons per 1,000 square feet of roof.**

Weather-strip windows & doors: This will seal out drafts and minimize heat loss.

Stock up on sandbags: If you've had flooding before or are in a flood-prone area, be safe and buy some sandbags for potentially leaky areas like doorways. Stack them 1 to 1.5 feet high, a minimum of two to three per area.

Consider flood insurance: It's a smart idea, even if you're not in a high-risk area. Also, review your homeowner's policy to see what weather-related damage is covered, if any. Add more coverage if necessary.

NOTE: It takes 30 days for any flood policy to become effective.

Cover & protect outdoor furniture: Shield barbecues, outdoor equipment, and firewood with heavy tarps secured with ropes or heavy objects like bricks.

Give trees a health & risk assessment: Use a certified arborist instead of a tree trimmer. Trees weigh less and are weaker now because they have less moisture in them. A sudden increase in water might add too much weight for some branches, and even the roots and trunk, to bear.

Back up vital data: Secure important documents and photos in the cloud, on a thumb drive, or a portable hard drive.

Keep electronics charged: Cellphones, laptops, tablets, and other portable devices won't do you any good if they

aren't charged up. Get in the habit of charging them fully. Consider a power inverter for your vehicles so you can have 110-volt AC electricity on the go.

Make sure your car is in shape: To navigate best on very wet roads, tires should have at least 50 percent of tread life left. Keep tires properly inflated to avoid hydroplaning. Also, check the condition of your braking system, windshield wipers, battery, and all exterior and interior lights. Drive with spare umbrellas, rubber boots and gloves, and other raingear, just in case.

Stash some cash: Keep an emergency supply available in the event you have to move out temporarily, your car breaks down, or you experience some other weather-related issues.

The best advice to be El Niño-ready is: Prepare now. Don't wait until you're caught in a deluge, because it's the toughest time to find solutions to the chaos around you.

For up-to-date information about El Niño, visit www.elnino.noaa.gov.

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