



MEMORANDUM

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR &
CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Sabrina B. Landreth
City Administrator

SUBJECT: El Niño Preparations

DATE: December 4, 2015

City Administrator

Date

Approval */s/*

12/4/15

INFORMATION

Weather forecasters are predicting this year's El Niño will bring significant rainfall and strong winds – the kind of conditions that may result in flooding, landslides, and downed trees and power lines throughout the City. The City of Oakland is preparing in advance to mitigate the impacts of severe weather and to protect residents, businesses and properties. While we cannot predict specific impacts to Oakland, we do know that preparedness is the key to resiliency. We are urging residents and businesses to prepare -- **before** heavy rains begin.

This memo provides information about steps the City is taking to prepare for El Niño and strong winter storms, and summarizes the communications efforts underway to ensure that we optimize the reach and repetition of our preparedness and recovery messages.

What to Expect

Weather forecasters are predicting periods of extremely heavy rain coupled with high tides, often referred to as "King Tides." Due to the natural characteristics of Oakland's geography, low-lying areas and properties adjacent to creeks, the estuary or Bay may flood in heavy rains, or during high tides even without rain. Strong winter storms may also result in high winds, fallen trees and branches, landslides and earth movement, power outages and traffic delays.

In October, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center released its first outlook for winter 2015-16, noting that this year's El Niño is among the strongest on record -- rivaling 1982-83 and 1997-98 for the strongest since 1950. Predictions have El Niño rainfall at 130% to 180% above average for winter 2015-16. You can stay up to date on the latest El Niño forecasts by visiting NOAA's website: <http://www.elnino.noaa.gov/forecast.html>.

City Preparations Are Under Way

The Oakland Public Works Department initiated Citywide planning in August to coordinate El Niño preparations and 24/7 storm response. The internal planning team has refined response processes to provide 24/7 coverage, identified mitigation steps to reduce risk and crafted a robust communications plan for both internal and external audiences. Coordinated planning efforts include the City Administrator's Office, Oakland Public Works, Fire, Emergency Management Services, Finance, Planning & Building and external partner agencies within Alameda County such as the Flood Control District.

Oakland Public Works will be the City's main responders when flooding occurs, deploying crews to respond to problem areas where there is flooding, trees down or other problems in the public right-of-way. First responders from Police and Fire will provide support as needed, depending on specific, storm-related impacts. Other departments will be called upon as needed to provide specific storm response or recovery services.

The following advance preparations will allow the City to respond as effectively as possible to anticipated increases in storm-related calls for service from the public.

Oakland Public Works is responsible for maintaining the City's storm drain system, including more than 10,000 storm drains, 370 miles of drain pipe, 7 pump stations and 40 miles of open creeks on public land. Oakland Public Works also maintains 920 miles of sanitary sewer pipes. For several months, Oakland Public Works has been expanding its operational readiness in preparation for El Niño. They are in the process of:

- Cleaning storm drains, inlets, culverts and drainage structures
- Conducting inspections of low-lying areas and City infrastructure
- Completing additional training to be able to respond as effectively as possible to anticipated increases in storm-related calls for service
- Inspecting more than 200 City facilities for pre-storm maintenance
- Reviewing and revising disaster plans to prepare for 24/7 response

Community Outreach and Information

A Citywide Communications team led by the City Administrator's Office is working to ensure that City employees and the public are informed about potential El Niño-related winter storm impacts, what the City is doing to prepare in advance and what residents and businesses can do to prepare and keep their families, neighbors and employees safe during and after big storms.

The City is preparing for 24/7 response operations, but in a severe storm with heavy rains and high winds, our crews – and crews around the entire region – are likely to be overwhelmed, so **residents are urged to be informed, have a plan and build an emergency kit with enough food and water supplies for their family and pets for 72 hours, just as in any emergency.**

Planned communications tools include:

- **Website**—www.oaklandnet.com/elnino. Comprehensive site dedicated to El Niño preparedness; for those without Internet access, preparation tips are available by calling (510) 444-CITY
- **Brochure and fact sheets**—Printed materials for in-person distribution that provide specific information about flooding, fallen trees and the City’s Adopt-a-Drain and CORE programs
- **Public Service Announcements**—Produced by KTOP to focus on preparedness, Adopt-a-Drain program, and how to place sandbags and plastic sheeting
- **Media relations**—News releases and media events (photo opportunities, media interviews) to focus on storm preparations and promote participation in the Adopt-a-Drain program and the Oakland Fire Department’s CORE emergency preparedness classes
- **Social media**—Regular preparedness tips distributed via Facebook and Twitter
- **Garbage bill insert**—Trilingual information in English, Spanish and Chinese
- **Oakland Tribune advertorial**—Focused on emergency preparedness
- **Speakers’ bureau**—Preparedness presentations provided to community groups by City staff
- **Targeted outreach**—Information for residents in flood- and slide-prone areas and vulnerable populations, including preparedness workshops and, if budget allows, direct mail
- **Employee communications**—Information to encourage City employees to prepare at home, sign up for City employee notifications and be ready to respond as disaster service workers, if required
- **KTVU “Bay Area People” segment**—Community affairs program focused on how residents can prepare their homes and cars, fill and place sandbags, clean storm drain inlets and what they need to know about flood insurance. Segment will air on Saturday, December 5 at 6:30 am on KTVU; we will post links to our El Niño website and push out over social media channels

How City Councilmembers Can Help

You can assist by sharing important preparedness messages with your constituents. Over the next several weeks and through the winter months/storm season, we will provide you with content for inclusion in your newsletters and e-blasts, as well as hard copies of collateral materials like a brochure and fact sheets that you can distribute at community meetings or during district office hours. We will also provide additional information regarding media opportunities that you can take part in to help raise awareness throughout our Oakland community.

Useful Resources

The City's website contains a variety of information about how to prepare for El Niño – or any emergency: www.oaklandnet.com/elnino. We will continue to update the site with information, and anyone can subscribe to the page to receive notifications about updates as they are posted. Those without Internet access can call (510) 444-CITY.

For storm-related emergency issues on public property and in the public right-of-way (e.g., flooding, mudslides and landslides onto streets and sidewalks), contact the Public Works Call Center directly at (510) 615-5566.

To report non-emergency issues, please contact the Call Center through one of the following channels:

- opwcallcenter@oaklandnet.com
- www.oaklandpw.com
- Mobile app: SeeClickFix

We strongly encourage residents and businesses to subscribe to receive Emergency Notifications:

- [Subscribe to Emergency Alerts for Oakland Residents](#)
- [Subscribe to Emergency Alerts for Oakland Merchants](#)
- [Subscribe to Updates to the El Niño Webpage](#)

To Adopt-a-Drain, visit adoptadrainoakland.com or call (510) 238-7630.

Emergency Response

The City's Emergency Operations Plan includes a Severe Weather Annex that provides protocols for responding to, and recovering from weather-related emergencies, such as flooding, wind storms, severe thunderstorms and lightning. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is always in a stand-by mode and ready to be activated due to flooding or other storm-related hazards.

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If the EOC is activated, the City Council will be notified as outlined in the Emergency Operations Plan. Elected officials are encouraged to update their emergency contact information with the Fire Department's Emergency Management Services Division via email to Eileen Ogata: eogata@oaklandnet.com.

The EOC Activation Pocket Guidebook for Elected Officials includes an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the City Council as outlined in the Emergency Response Plan. If you would like a copy of the guidebook, please send a request to eogata@oaklandnet.com.

For questions, please contact Karen Boyd, Communications Director, 238-6365.