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SURVIVING THE STORM: THE DISASTER DEFENSE DIGEST



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Safety Message:

Protecting Our Seniors

As California prepares for a potentially powerful El Niño season, our senior citizens deserve special attention. Heavy rains, flooding, power outages, and road closures can create dangerous situations, especially for older adults living alone or managing medical conditions.

Take a few minutes to check on elderly family members, friends, and neighbors before storms arrive. Make sure they have enough medications, drinking water, nonperishable food, flashlights, and working communication devices. Help them sign up for emergency alerts and develop an evacuation plan that accounts for mobility challenges, medical equipment, and transportation needs.

During severe weather, a simple phone call or knock on the door can make all the difference. Never assume someone else is checking on them.

This El Niño season, remember that protecting our most vulnerable neighbors is everyone's responsibility. Sometimes, the most important emergency supply is a caring neighbor.

Pacific Fury: El Niño Unleashed

The Pacific is warming, and California has reason to pay attention. Scientists are watching an unusually powerful El Niño develop across the tropical Pacific Ocean, raising the possibility of a winter that could test storm drains, roads, hillsides, and household emergency plans.

You have probably heard the phrase “Super El Niño.” It sounds like a weather disaster with a name, but it is not an official warning that a catastrophic storm is headed our way. El Niño describes a natural climate pattern in which unusually warm ocean water near the equator changes winds and rainfall patterns around the globe.

When that warming becomes especially intense, people often call it a super El Niño. This year, the concern is real. In its October 2026 outlook, NOAA said a strong to very strong El Niño was likely to continue into early 2027. Its winter forecast also favors wetter than average conditions across much of California. That does not mean every county will flood or that rain will fall nonstop. It means the odds are shifting toward a stormier season, and that deserves our attention.

Think of a seasonal forecast as a warning about the kind of winter we might face, not a calendar showing exactly when trouble will arrive. Scientists can recognize broad patterns months in advance. They cannot tell you in October which street will flood in January, whether an atmospheric river will stall over your town, or how high the snow level will climb during a particular storm. Those details become clearer days, sometimes hours, beforehand.

And those details matter. A prolonged downpour can overwhelm drainage systems. Heavy rain over a recent burn scar can trigger dangerous debris flows. Warm storms may bring rain instead of snow to some elevations, increasing runoff. Even neighborhoods far from rivers can experience flooded intersections, fallen trees, and extended power outages. This is not a reason to panic. It is a reason to stop putting preparedness off.

Walk around your property before the heavy rains arrive. Clear safe, accessible drainage areas. Check your roof and gutters, review your insurance, charge backup batteries, and assemble essential supplies. Know at least two ways out of your neighborhood and sign up for local emergency alerts. Never drive through floodwater, even if the road looks familiar.

Most importantly, understand the difference between a forecast and a warning. Seasonal outlooks tell us what conditions are more likely. Local weather alerts tell us when to act.

California cannot control what the Pacific sends our way. But we can control whether we are caught off guard. If this winter turns rough, the preparations we make today may be what keeps an inconvenience from becoming an emergency for the people we love.

Quick Tip:

One Extinguisher Doesn't Fight Every Fire!

Imagine discovering a small fire in your kitchen or garage. Your heart races, and you grab the nearest fire extinguisher. But is it the right one? Knowing the difference could protect your home and the people you love.

Fire extinguishers are designed for different hazards:

Class A: Ordinary materials like wood, paper, and fabric.

Class B: Flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, and paint solvents.

Class C: Fires involving energized electrical equipment, including appliances and wiring.

Class K: Cooking oils and grease, particularly in deep fryers.

For most homes, a multipurpose ABC fire extinguisher is a practical choice because it handles several common fire hazards.

Remember, never use water on a grease fire or energized electrical equipment.

Only attempt to extinguish a small, contained fire when you have a clear escape route and know how to use the extinguisher.

Your family's safety always comes first. When in doubt, get out and call 911!



When Your Home Whispers Fire



Most house fires don't announce themselves with roaring flames. Sometimes, the first warning is a breaker that trips twice in one week, an outlet that feels warm, or a faint smell you can't quite place. It is easy to shrug these things off, especially when the lights still work. But your electrical system may be telling you something is wrong.

Your breaker box, also called an electrical panel, is designed to protect your home by cutting power when a circuit draws too much current or develops certain faults. Outlets, switches, and cords can also reveal trouble. Here are five warning signs every household should recognize.

First, pay attention to breakers that repeatedly trip. A single trip can happen when too many appliances run on one circuit, but repeated trips should never become routine. Do not keep resetting the breaker or replace it with a larger one. Stop using the affected circuit and have a licensed electrician find the cause.

Second, listen for buzzing, sizzling, or crackling around outlets, switches, or the panel. Electricity should not sound like bacon frying in the kitchen wall. Those noises can point to loose connections or arcing, where electricity jumps through an unintended path and generates intense heat. Stop using the affected equipment and arrange professional inspection. Do not remove the electrical panel cover yourself.

Third, take burning smells seriously, even when there is no smoke. Overheating insulation and plastic can give off a sharp, fishy, or melting odor. If you notice an unexplained burning smell near electrical wiring or the panel, move people away and contact the fire department from a safe location. If you see smoke or flames, get outside and call 911. Never pour water onto an electrical fire.

Third, take burning smells seriously, even when there is no smoke. Overheating insulation and plastic can give off a sharp, fishy, or melting odor. If you notice an unexplained burning smell near electrical wiring or the panel, move people away and contact the fire department from a safe location. If you see smoke or flames, get outside and call 911. Never pour water onto an electrical fire.

Fourth, look for visible signs of heat or damage. Brown or black marks around an outlet, melted plastic, rust on the breaker box, or signs of water getting inside the panel all deserve attention. Do not touch suspicious equipment to test whether it is hot, and never operate electrical equipment that has gotten wet. A qualified electrician can assess what needs repair or replacement.

Fifth, notice outlets that will not hold a plug securely, plugs that become unusually hot, or tingling when you touch an appliance. These are not harmless quirks of an older home. Stop using the outlet or appliance until it has been checked. Extension cords and power strips are not permanent fixes for overloaded circuits, either.

A quick, careful look around your home today can prevent a serious problem tomorrow. Keep the breaker box accessible and free of stored items, label circuits clearly, and make sure family members know where it is. Have an electrician check persistent problems rather than relying on guesswork or do-it-yourself electrical repairs.

Your home often gives you small warnings before a major emergency. The safest response is not to wait for the smell to get stronger or the breaker to trip again. Notice it. Take it seriously. Get help before a warning becomes a fire.

Before the Rain Finds You

There is something comforting about hearing rain on the roof while your family is safe and warm inside. But that peaceful sound can quickly turn frightening when water begins dripping through the ceiling, the power goes out, or the street outside becomes a river. With a potentially powerful El Niño winter approaching California, preparing your home is no longer something to leave for another day.

El Niño can increase the likelihood of heavier rainfall and stronger storms across parts of California. While nobody can predict exactly which neighborhoods will flood, one thing is certain: families who prepare before the storms arrive are better equipped to handle whatever Mother Nature brings.

Start by looking at your home from the outside. Are your gutters clogged with leaves? Do your downspouts direct water away from the foundation? Are tree branches hanging dangerously close to your roof? Small maintenance problems can become expensive emergencies during prolonged rainfall. Clear accessible drainage areas, inspect your roof from the ground, and hire professionals for dangerous work at heights.

Next, look around your property. Water naturally follows the path of least resistance, and sometimes that path leads directly into your garage or living room. Identify low spots where water collects, check nearby storm drains for visible blockages, and consider whether sandbags or other flood barriers might help protect vulnerable entrances. Never enter flooded areas to clear drains.

Inside your home, preparation becomes a family responsibility. Gather everyone around the kitchen table and talk about what happens if the electricity goes out for two days. Where are the flashlights? How will you charge your phones? What happens if roads close and you cannot get to the grocery store?



Build an emergency supply kit containing drinking water, nonperishable food, medications, batteries, first aid supplies, blankets, and essential hygiene items. Remember your pets, too. Children can help pack supplies, while older family members can identify medications, mobility equipment, or other necessities they depend on.

Power outages deserve special attention. Keep phones charged when storms approach, protect sensitive electronics with appropriate surge protection, and never operate generators inside garages or near doors and windows. Generators must remain outdoors, at least 20 feet from buildings, with exhaust directed away from openings. Flooded electrical equipment should never be touched.

Equally important is having a family evacuation plan. Identify two possible routes out of your neighborhood, choose a safe meeting location, and make sure everyone knows how to communicate if separated. Keep important documents in waterproof containers and review your flood insurance coverage before storms arrive.

Finally, sign up for local emergency alerts and pay attention when officials issue flood watches, warnings, or evacuation notices. Never drive through flooded roadways, regardless of how familiar the route looks.

The goal is not to frighten your family. It is to protect them. A little preparation today can prevent a frightening situation tomorrow.

CAL TERRA Training Spotlight!

BLaCK BAER Training: (Biological Landscape and Cultural Knowledge – Burned Area Emergency Response) is a specialized training and workforce development program that prepares participants to support post-fire assessment, stabilization, and recovery efforts through a blend of technical BAER practices and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

Designed with a strong Tribal lens, the program equips individuals with skills in soil stabilization, erosion control, watershed protection, cultural resource protection, and ecological restoration following wildfire and other land-disturbing events.

Through classroom instruction, field-based training, and applied project work, BLaCK BAER builds a culturally grounded workforce capable of working alongside agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service while advancing Tribal leadership in land stewardship, post-fire recovery, and long-term ecosystem resilience.

Step up. Get trained. Make a difference.

Be part of something that matters. For more information about our training programs, contact us at: info@calterra.org