UC Irvine
Emergency Management

El Nino Preparedness Guidance

Purpose: This document provides UC Irvine departments and operational units with an overview of potential winter weather impacts associated with El Niño and preparedness actions to consider based on their specific risks, needs, and available resources. It is intended to support local departmental planning, coordination with internal and external partners, and efforts to protect the UCI community and maintain essential operations.

Situation Summary: As of September 10, 2026, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center indicates that El Niño is strengthening, with a greater than 90% chance of a very strong event during fall and winter 2026–27 and a 75% chance of reaching historic strength during October–December 2026. NOAA cautions that stronger El Niño conditions increase the likelihood of typical El Niño impacts but do not guarantee specific regional outcomes. NOAA CPC ENSO Diagnostic Discussion

Key Planning Assumptions: UCI should plan for a winter where a small number of major storms may drive most operational impacts.

The most likely operational concerns are:

- Localized and regional flooding; stormwater system overload
- Roof leaks, water intrusion, and facilities/infrastructure damage
- Road closures affecting students, staff, patients, and deliveries
- Power outages and generator/fuel issues
- Disruption to clinical, residential, research, animal care, childcare, dining, and field operations
- Coastal flooding, erosion, or high surf impacts for coastal counties
- Debris flows and landslides, especially near burn scars, slopes, canyons, and coastal bluffs
- Higher snow levels during warmer storms, with implications for Sierra travel and runoff timing

Preparedness Guidance

The actions below are provided as guidance to support winter preparedness and are not requirements. Campus is encouraged to use their judgment to determine which actions are applicable and feasible, and to prioritize them based on their risks, operational needs, and available resources. Many actions involve coordination across departments or with external partners; campus can determine the appropriate lead and supporting units. The list is not exhaustive, and departments may identify additional actions based on their specific risks and operational needs.

#	ACTION
1	Review continuity plans for housing, dining, health care, research, IT, animal care, and other essential functions.
2	Review winter storm, flood, debris-flow, and power outage plans and response checklists.
3	Establish forecast monitoring responsibilities and triggers for departmental preparedness actions, enhanced staffing, leadership briefings, and Crisis Core Team/Emergency Operations Center activation.
4	Review accessible evacuation, shelter-in-place, and temporary relocation arrangements.
5	For sites near burn scars or unstable slopes, review debris-flow and landslide exposure, warning procedures, and evacuation triggers.
6	Identify vulnerable buildings, roads, parking areas, construction sites, and other known problem areas.
7	Inspect and clear drainage inlets, storm drains, gutters, culverts, and roof drains. Inspect campus-managed creeks, dams, and associated drainage structures and arrange appropriate debris removal.
8	Inspect roofs, building envelopes, and temporary structures; secure rooftop equipment and address wind and water intrusion vulnerabilities.
9	Test emergency generators and backup power systems; confirm fuel availability and critical equipment coverage.
10	Review potential storm-related disruptions to campus access, including flooding of campus entrances and surrounding roadways. Identify alternate access routes and coordinate procedures for monitoring closures and communicating access changes to the campus community.
11	Inspect utility vaults and manholes for debris and water intrusion. Test sump pumps and confirm portable and spare pumps are functional and available.
12	Test installed emergency lighting and confirm portable lighting is functional and available.
13	Assess trees and limbs near buildings, roads, walkways, and utilities; complete pruning or removal of identified hazards.
14	Confirm decision authority and procedures for class changes, remote work, building closures, and suspension of activities.
15	Review procedures for coordinating and distributing accessible emergency notifications and campus operational updates related to severe weather, flooding, outages, road closures, and changes to campus operations.
16	Confirm departmental supplies, minimum staffing, alternate work arrangements, and support for multi-day disruptions.
17	Review and confirm documentation needed for property insurance claims with relevant campus partners, including procedures for documenting storm damage, emergency repairs, and associated costs.

#	ACTION
18	Validate patient access, staff lodging, supply deliveries, backup power, and emergency coordination.
19	Review winter readiness at remote properties, including UCI Nature sites. Confirm emergency communications, evacuation routes and alternate access, visitor and field researcher accountability, and supplies for potential isolation or delayed emergency response.
20	Review procedures for assessing and reporting departmental operational impacts, facility damage, and resource needs following severe weather events.

Systemwide Coordination: Systemwide Emergency Management will convene a situational awareness call when forecast or observed storm impacts could significantly affect multiple UC locations, or when a location's anticipated support needs warrant systemwide coordination. These calls are an opportunity to share anticipated impacts, operational status, protective actions, and potential resource or mutual aid needs.

UC locations should notify Systemwide Emergency Management of significant storm-related impacts or anticipated disruptions, including campus access limitations, changes to campus operations, and potential requests for assistance.