California State Parks Division of Boating and Waterways
California Coastal Commission
**El Niño Preparedness**
**Recommendation for Boaters**

El Niño—an ocean-atmosphere climate pattern associated with warming in the Pacific—may bring significant storms to California this winter. Boat owners and marina operators should prepare for extreme weather events through spring 2027.

Below you'll find resources about El Niño, its potential effects on California's waterways, and safety precautions to take.

## What Boaters Should Know about El Niño Winter Boating Safety

**Keep informed about the latest weather, water, and tidal conditions.**

Develop a list of weather resources, sign up for alerts, and use them before boating. In addition to local weather forecasts, critical meteorological information is available for boaters and marina operators:

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| www.weather.gov | National Weather Service – Active Alerts, Forecasts, Conditions |
| www.weather.gov/wrh/hazards | National Weather Service Western Region – Detailed Hazards |
| www.navcen.uscg.gov | United State Coast Guard – Local Notice to Mariners |
| cdec.water.ca.gov/river/rivcond.html | California Data Exchange – River Conditions |

Tune to local radio stations or the National Weather Radio Broadcasts on frequencies of 162.400, 162.425, 162.450, 162.475, 162.525, and 162.550 MHz in areas where available.

**Check your boat's required safety equipment.** California boating laws require recreational boats to carry safety equipment including flares to visually signal distress; a whistle, bell or horn to sound distress calls; and properly fitted and serviceable U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets for all passengers on board. After a busy summer boating season, make sure your required safety equipment is ready and in working order.

During the winter it is especially important to have good anchoring equipment and bailing devices and to know how to use them. The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadrons offer complimentary vessel safety checks. For a full list of required equipment and for general safety information visit the ABCs of California Boating.

**Avoid boating during strong weather.** High tides, storm surges, poor visibility, moving sandbars, and debris contribute to dangerous conditions during winter. Conditions on the water change rapidly. Boaters who need to be on the water this winter should carry a registered Emergency Position-Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) and know how to use it. For more Information: https://www.sarsat.noaa.gov/

**Always file a float plan with friends or family.** Searches for an overdue boat are more likely to succeed if the U.S. Coast Guard or other rescue agencies have specific information about the intended voyage. For your own safety, before you go boating, file a float plan with a reliable person who will notify authorities if necessary.

At a minimum a float plan should include the location to which you will be heading and your approximate time of return. Check in regularly with those who are aware of your plan, especially if your plan changes.

**Have an emergency and accident plan in place for your boat.** Boaters must know what to do in an emergency. Emergency and accident procedures for recreational boaters can be viewed in the ABCs of California Boating. Read this important information and perform an accident drill with your crew. Create and carry a contact list of emergency resources such as local first responders.

Make sure you also have an emergency plan in place for you and your family at home and at your workplace. Create a list of local resources including:

- Fire department
- Public health department
- Public works dispatch center
- Electric/gas utility provider

**Check that your emergency supply kit is up to date.** Emergency supply kits for both home and boat should be checked, and older supplies including food, water, batteries, maps, and updated contact information should be replaced with fresh supplies. Include a flashlight and battery-powered or hand-crank radio, blankets, medicines, and cash.

**If your boat is moored or docked throughout the winter season, check before and after a storm to make sure dock lines are properly secured.** Know how your boat should be docked and/or moored to avoid storm damage. Check your vessel before and after storms to ensure dock lines are properly secured. Take a boating safety class or review how to secure your boat.

**Top 5 Actions to Take Before a Storm**

1. Monitor official weather forecasts and alerts frequently as conditions can shift quickly.
2. Secure loose gear on your vessel, including canvas, lines, fenders, sails, and electronics.
3. Inspect and reinforce dock lines, fenders, and chafe gear.
4. Ensure emergency supply kits—for home and vessel—are fully stocked and current.
5. File or update your float plan with a reliable contact and notify them of any schedule changes.

**Review Your Insurance Coverage**
Ahead of winter storms, review your vessel's insurance policy to confirm storm-related coverage. Check deductibles, required precautions, coverage limits, and any documentation needed for potential claims. Contact your insurer if you have questions

regarding haul-outs, mooring requirements, or weather-related exclusions.

**Preventing Marina Damage**
To protect both your vessel and marina facilities during storm conditions:

- Remove or secure loose items such as dock boxes, canvas covers, and portable equipment.
- Ensure dock lines are properly sized, in good condition, and protected from chafing.
- Secure or elevate electrical cords to reduce exposure to rising water.
- Coordinate with marina staff when possible to confirm your slip and surrounding area are storm-ready.

**Clean Boating Management Practices During El Niño Conditions**
Heavy rain, high winds, and flooding can carry pollutants into California waterways. Boaters can help protect water quality during storm season by following clean boating practices.

**Prevent Fuel, Oil, and Hazardous Spills**

- Inspect fuel lines, clamps, seals, and bilge areas; replace saturated absorbents before storms and dispose of them at your County Household Hazardous Waste facility.
- Keep deck fill caps secured and avoid topping off fuel tanks before severe weather.
- Store paints, cleaners, batteries, and engine fluids in sealed containers and dispose of hazardous waste properly.

**Reduce Trash and Debris Risks**

- Remove or secure loose items—plastics, canvas, buckets, lines—to prevent washout into waterways.
- Use covered, secured bins for trash and recycling.

**Protect Water Quality While Winterizing**

- Never discharge contaminated bilge water; use absorbents or pumps for proper disposal.
- Choose biodegradable cleaners and eco-friendly maintenance supplies.

**Maintain Marine Sanitation Devices (MSDs)**

- Inspect hoses, clamps, seals, Y-valves, and vents to prevent leaks.
- Keep Y-valves closed to prevent illegal discharges.

**Pump Out Before Storms**

- Empty holding tanks ahead of storms to prevent overflow.
- Use pumpout stations regularly; never discharge sewage overboard.

**Prevent Sewage Overflows and Damage**

- Secure deck pumpout caps before high winds or rain.
- Inspect holding tanks after storms for backflow or rising levels.
- Strap down portable toilets and secure waste containers.

**Protect Marina Facilities**

- Do not leave sewage hoses or pumpout accessories on docks.
- Report damaged pumpout stations promptly to marina staff.

Most importantly, keep **safety** in mind and **never risk human life for the sake of protecting property!**

Please share this information. For more information on El Niño and storm preparation:

- www.storms.ca.gov
- www.weather.gov
- dbw.parks.ca.gov
- California Coastal Commission