

# VENTURA COUNTY STAR

## Opinion

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### Editorial

## Don't wait for first raindrop from El Niño

Weather forecasters this week took the rare step of guaranteeing us that we will have an El Niño this winter and that it will bring rain. No more percentages or "highly likely" scenarios, just a flat assurance that the rain is coming.

At the same time, the forecasters also guaranteed us that the winter rain will not end our drought.

Bill Patzert, the climatologist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, gave the prediction of the "Godzilla" El Niño weather pattern, similar to the winter of 1997-98 that broke records as one of the wettest in county history. The weather patterns, he explained, make it impossible to predict otherwise.

The problem is that all the rain will fall in a fairly short amount of time, most likely in the first few months of 2016. We have no way of capturing most of it to save for when the rain stops. If the storm patterns include the Sierra Nevada, it will create a snowpack that will stretch the impact of the rain throughout the year.

But one year does not make up for a four-year drought.

That means we must continue in all our efforts to change how we use, store and create water for California. The amazing numbers already achieved throughout Ventura County for water conservation must continue. The discussions about long-term water storage for the state must get serious and those projects must be funded. The Delta plan must move out of the political and regulatory realm and become a reality. And local efforts such as we have seen in several of our communities to create potable water out of unusable supplies must be completed.

All that will take serious focus at a time when we are sloshing through too much water this winter.

In the short term, we must recognize the potential problems a series of downpours might bring upon the county. The Ventura County Public Works Agency is already conducting reviews of potential trouble spots, in addition to running mock drills on handling emergencies.

It's reassuring to see them take such a proactive stand. Just as it's reassuring to see the city of Camarillo work with Camarillo Springs homeowners on a quick solution to the unstable hillside above those homes.

Now the rest of us need to do what is necessary to get ready for rain. The county Public Works Agency, on its Ready Ventura County website ([www.readyventuracounty.org](http://www.readyventuracounty.org)) provides some tips:

- Assemble emergency supply kits for your home, workplace and vehicle.

- Store the following materials for protecting your home in a location away from potential flooding: sandbags, plastic sheeting, plywood and lumber.

- Teach children not to play in or near rivers, streams or other areas of potential flooding.

- Maintain fuel in your cars; electrical outages might make gasoline pumps inoperable.

- Identify safe routes from your home or workplace to high ground. Determine whether you can use these routes during flooding or storms.

- Clear debris and overgrowth from gutters and storm drains.

- Notify your local department of public works about debris and overgrowth in public drainage facilities.

- Work with neighbors to solve potential drainage problems and to avoid diverting debris onto their properties.

Don't wait for the first raindrop. The time to get started is now.

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