

## **El Nino Preparation**

# **8 Essential Pre-Winter Home Maintenance Tasks**

El Niño conditions in the Pacific Ocean that were first identified in March are strengthening, renewing hope that the next winter could be a long-awaited wet one for California. The return of El Niño may mean more nightmarish weather conditions for Southern California or nothing at all. Either way, it's best to be prepared.

During February 1998, a powerful jet stream pounded California with an unrelenting series of wet Pacific storms. Longstanding rainfall records fell. Oceanfront homes slumped into the roiling surf. Roads washed out across the state. Federal disaster areas were declared in 35 counties. At least 17 people died. The Red Cross opened 79 shelters and fed more than 100,000 people

Experts predict we may be in for a very wet, wild winter ride, thanks to the effects of what could be the strongest El Niño in more than a decade. But it's too soon to know whether El Niño will last through California's late autumn and winter rainy season, there's no certainty either way.

### **What can you do to prepare for Winter Storms?**

#### **1. Inspect your Roof**

Roofs are tricky; walking on a roof can be dangerous and can damage tiles. Repair damaged, loose or missing tiles and/or shingles that may leak during winter's storms. Pay special attention to flat and low-pitched roof areas, they weather the

quickest and normally leak first. Rake or blow off fall leaves and pine needles, which hold moisture and cause deterioration.

Check your attic next. Look for water stains and mold, which are usually indicative of a leaking roof or sub-par ventilation. For proper ventilation, make sure that none of the vents in the attic are covered or obstructed by insulation.

## **2. Check the flashings**

Make sure the flashings are caulked and sealed around the chimney and vents. The roof edge metal should overlap into the gutters.

## **3. Clean your Gutters**

If your gutters are full of debris, water can back up against the house and damage roofing, stucco, siding and wood trim -- plus cause leaks. Make sure your gutters drain towards down spouts, you would be surprised at the number of sagging gutters that do not drain properly. Also look for missing or damaged gutters and fascia boards and repair them.

## **4. Divert Water**

Most newer homes have yard drains that act as collectors for the downspouts. Make sure that they are clear of debris especially plant material. Older homes downspouts drain directly into the yard or on top of the hardscape. Add extensions to downspouts so that water runs at least 3 to 4 feet away from the foundation.

## **5. Foundation**

Depending on the exterior siding on your home, the distance between the ground and the start of your stucco, wood siding, and trim varies. The component that actually keeps water out of your home is located behind the stucco and/or siding of your

home- the building paper, the building paper acts as a moisture barrier and drainage plane. The water drains out at the bottom of the wall. Wood siding should be 6" above the ground. Stucco should be 4" above the ground and 2" above hardscape. Make sure that the ground slopes away from the foundation and that there aren't any shrubs or plants close to the side of the house holding moisture.

## **6. Windows and Doors.**

Check weather-stripping around the windows and doors. Water testing the windows and doors now, is easier than in the middle of a rainstorm. Add weather-stripping as needed around doors, making sure you cannot see any daylight from inside your home. Windows and doors have weep holes in the lower frame that allows water entering the frame to escape. Open your windows and doors and pour a small amount of water into the track, it should weep out the small holes in the bottom frame. If not, they need to be cleaned.

If the gaps between stucco, siding, trim, window or door frames are bigger than the width of a nickel, you need to reapply exterior caulk. Silicone caulk is best for exterior use because it won't shrink and it's impervious to the elements.

## **7. Yard Drains**

Clear all debris and plant materials from around the yard drain inlets. Run your hose in the drain inlets for several minutes to insure they are draining properly. If they back up, call a drain clearing service.

**8. Test your sump pump.** Slowly pour several gallons of water into the sump pit to see whether the pump turns on. You should do this every few months, but especially after a long dry season or

before a rainy one. Your sump may be the first thing that overflows, make sure it operates correctly. Most sump pumps last about ten years.

**Be Prepared.** If your home has flooded in the past and if you haven't already fixed the problem, find out what you can do to mitigate the cause. Check to see what your insurance will cover on storm and flood damage.

**Avoid the rush.** Don't wait for the first winter storm

**Sand Bags and Plastic** If there are small areas, which could be affected by excess rainfall, consider stockpiling sand bags and plastic sheeting to divert water.

The use of sandbags is a simple, but effective, way to prevent or reduce floodwater damage. Properly filled and placed, sandbags can act as a barrier to divert moving water around instead of through buildings. Sandbag construction does not guarantee a watertight seal, but is satisfactory for use in most situations.

SANDBAG SUPPLIERS: Saddleback Sandbags, Home Depot (Various Locations), LA County Sandbags, Aire Industrial

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