

City of Piedmont COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: October 19, 2026

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Rosanna Bayon Moore, City Administrator

SUBJECT: Informational Report on 2026–27 El Niño Winter Storm Preparedness and Response Readiness

RECOMMENDATION

Receive an informational report on winter storm preparedness and response readiness for the City of Piedmont, Alameda County, and the State of California in advance of the forecast 2026–27 El Niño season. This item is for information only; no Council action is requested.

BACKGROUND

This report summarizes the current forecast for the 2026–27 winter, the preparedness actions taken by the State of California and the Alameda County Operational Area, and the preparations of City departments for storm-related impacts in Piedmont.

NOAA Forecast and Expected Conditions in Northern California

El Niño is a periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, which can change the frequency, track, and intensity of winter storms reaching California.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center has an El Niño Advisory in effect. NOAA estimates a greater than 83 percent chance of a strong to very strong El Niño persisting through January–March 2027, and an 83 percent chance that the October–December 2026 period will exceed the strength of all El Niño events recorded since 1950. NOAA notes that an event of this size increases the likelihood of typical El Niño impacts but does not guarantee them. For Piedmont, the conditions related to a strong El Niño of most concern are repeated periods of heavy rain on saturated soils, high winds, and the associated effects: hillside slope movement and landslides, downed trees and power lines, localized street flooding where storm drain inlets are blocked or over capacity, and extended power outages.

State of California Preparations

On September 21, 2026, Governor Newsom proclaimed a statewide State of Emergency in advance of the El Niño season. The proclamation allows state resources to be mobilized and procurement to be streamlined before storms arrive. Among other actions, it directs state agencies to lead flood-

risk-reduction efforts and to stage flood-fighting supplies and equipment; directs Caltrans to stage traffic control and road closure equipment on at risk highways; prepares the California National Guard to support flood response, search and rescue, engineering, and logistics missions; directs environmental and natural resource agencies to expedite permitting for local flood, landslide, and debris flow preparation; and directs the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to expand multilingual public preparedness communications.

On October 1, 2026, Cal OES held an hour-long webinar for fire and emergency services outlining the response and coordination structures in place at the state level. Piedmont staff attended the webinar.

Alameda County Operational Area Preparations

The Alameda County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services (Alameda County OES) manages the County Emergency Operations Center and coordinates information and resources among the jurisdictions of the Alameda County Operational Area, including Piedmont. Resource requests that exceed the City's capacity are routed through the Operational Area to the State. To date, the Operational Area has hosted one El Niño specific coordination call with cities and special districts which focused on a situational awareness briefing with the National Weather Service Bay Area office as well as coordination efforts and flood control measures. Alameda County OES manages AC Alert and is using that platform to push out messaging to signed up users. The County Public Information Officers October meeting focused primarily on coordinated messaging and public information related to El Niño.

City of Piedmont Preparations

City departments prepare for winter storms each year. In light of the forecast, staff are reviewing these preparations and coordinating across departments. The following sections describe the preparations of each function.

Public Works Storm Response

Public Works is responsible for the City's storm drain system, streets, and trees in the public right of way, and is the lead department for clearing debris and restoring access after storms.

- Storm drain system: Public Works conducts pre-season inspection and cleaning of catch basins, inlets, culverts, and known problem locations. During a storm, crews continuously monitor storm drains and public spaces for flooding and clearing problem areas.
- Trees: Piedmont regularly maintains City street trees and park trees through inspections and pruning. This regular maintenance goes a long way to mitigating problems when storms arise. However, trees and limbs still fall into the public right of way and are dealt with by a combination of Firefighters, Public Works crews, utility companies, if power and communication lines are involved, and tree service contractors as they are available for emergency response.
- Sandbags: Sandbags are available for residents at the corporation yard on Red Rock Road. Residents may take up to 10 sandbags during business hours Monday to Friday, from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for use at their homes in Piedmont.

- Equipment and staffing: When severe storms are forecast for Piedmont, Public Works on call crews are ready at a moment's notice and if severe enough, are able to bunk at the corporation yard overnight. During the storm, these crews patrol the City for problem areas in the storm drain system and other public resources.
- Coordination: Public Works crews carry the same radios Police Officers and Firefighters use. In a storm, 9-1-1 dispatchers are able to reach these crews directly via radio and cell phone.

Piedmont Fire Department Storm Response

The Fire Department responds to storm-related emergencies including downed power lines, trees on structures and vehicles, flooding in structures, landslides, and medical emergencies, and it coordinates the City's emergency management functions.

- Staffing: The Fire Department staffs at normal levels for severe storms.
- Equipment: The Fire Department uses its utility pickup truck as a storm response vehicle, pre-equipping it with emergency generators, sump pumps, chainsaws, lights, and hand tools that may be needed for storm response. When 9-1-1 storm calls come in, the truck is driven in tandem with normal apparatus to provide a full complement of equipment to deal with most hazards such as flooding and downed trees.
- Emergency operations: Such as in the severe storms of New Year's Eve 2022 and winter of 2023, the response resources in Piedmont and surrounding communities can require assistance from the Operational Area and Cal OES. The Fire Department is the lead on such coordination providing situation status updates, resource requests, and other coordination before, during, and after an event. These processes ensure adequate resources and reimbursement opportunities are properly documented and submitted.
- Generator: The fire station and City Hall have an emergency generator that provides power during a power outage. The Fire Department is responsible for regular testing and maintenance of this generator and in preparation for a storm, coordinates with Public Works to ensure it is fueled and plan for re-fueling if needed.

Piedmont Police Department Storm Response and Dispatch Communications

The Police Department provides traffic control, road closures, scene security, and welfare checks during storms. The Department also operates the City's public safety dispatch center, which receives emergency and non-emergency calls and dispatches field resources.

- Field operations: In addition to their normal duties, police officers can be called during a storm for traffic control and road closures, coordination with Public Works for barricades, and assistance to residents.
- Dispatch staffing: The dispatch communications center is the nerve-center of Piedmont's storm response. They provide front-line answering of non-emergency and 9-1-1 phone calls. They triage and dispatch police, fire, Public Works crews, as well as function as the primary contact with utilities and outside agencies who field personnel request.
- Generator: The police station, including the communications center, have an emergency

generator that provides power during a power outage. The Police Department is responsible for regular testing and maintenance of this generator and in preparation for a storm, coordinates with Public Works to ensure it is fueled with a plan for re-fueling if needed.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

Storm preparation activities, overtime, and fuel are funded within existing department operating budgets. Recovery costs associated with response to a significant storm event may be eligible for reimbursement if state or federal disaster declarations are made for the Operational Area.

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