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Submitted in PS Committee

Council File No: 15-0887 **CITY OF LOS ANGELES**  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Item No.: 15-0887-S1

Deputy: Emergency Management Dept.

Date: October 6, 2015



To: Honorable City Council Members  
City Council  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 340  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

From: James G. Featherstone, General Manager  
Emergency Management Department

Subject: **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT EL NIÑO  
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE FOR FY 15-16 RAINY SEASON (CF  
15-0887 & 15-0887-S1)**

This report is in response to Council Motions Nos. 15-0887 (Bonin) and 15-0887-S1 (Koretz/Ryu) introduced on July 28, 2015 and August 19, 2015 respectively. In the referenced motions, the Emergency Management Department (EMD) is instructed to report relative to the City's efforts to prepare for potential El Niño events.

## HISTORY/BACKGROUND

### The Issue

The Emergency Management Department (EMD) and our City partners have been closely monitoring the developing science and predictions surrounding the El Niño Southern Oscillation. Many community members are concerned about the impact of El Niño on Los Angeles and want to know what the City is doing to prepare for and respond to the impacts of this weather pattern on our residences, businesses, and services. EMD has been working with partners at the National Weather Service and the U.S. Geological Survey to ensure that we consistently have the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on which to base our preparations, decisions, recommendations, and guidance.

### The Science and Known Information

Current science indicates a 95% chance that the current El Niño event will continue this winter before gradually weakening in Spring 2016. Forecasters and computer models are predicting a moderate to strong El Niño season, which will likely result in major rainfall throughout Los Angeles this winter (December – February). While we cannot predict at this stage the timing or intensity of particular storms, we do know that Los Angeles is likely to see significantly more rainfall in inches than in a normal winter. This rainfall may come in short, intense storms or in more prolonged storms.

## **Impact on Los Angeles**

The City is preparing for several potential impacts of the El Niño weather pattern. Potential impacts include multiple storms, multiple days of continuous rain, coastal erosion, large wave actions, flooding, and debris flows near recent burn areas. While we cannot predict the exact time and/or scope of El Niño impacts, we can prepare for the many affects and secondary consequences associated with severe weather.

## **Overview of City Efforts**

EMD routinely reviews, updates, and approves emergency response plans and hazard-specific annexes and supporting documents. All City emergency operations plans have been reviewed and revised within the past two (2) years. These plans are available on the City's intranet allowing City employees to review their department specific roles and responsibilities for any incident. Previously established plans with relevancy to the anticipated affects of El Niño include:

- City Emergency Operations Plan
- Adverse Weather Annex
- Urban Flooding Annex
- Debris Flow Annex
- Tsunami Annex
- Early Warnings & Notifications Annex
- Emergency Public Information Annex
- Communications Annex
- Mass Care & Sheltering Annex
- Logistics Annex
- Evacuation Annex
- Recovery Annex
- Department Continuity of Operations Plans
- Department Emergency Plans

### **• Fire Department**

Ahead of El Niño, the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) will designate an LAFD El Niño Planning Officer and a Deputy Planning Officer. Additionally, LAFD training blocks over the next few months will focus on El Niño planning and Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and Department Operations Center (DOC) readiness. In a major El Niño incident, the Los Angeles Fire Department would be the lead agency in the City's EOC.

LAFD has extensive plans in place for debris flow monitoring in areas that have experienced wildfires, as well as plans and procedures for swift water rescues. LAFD will work with the Bureau of Engineering geotechnical engineers to anticipate potential high-hazard areas before and during precipitation. In high-hazard areas and based on relevant information, LAFD will work within Unified Command to evacuate community members.

In anticipation of wet weather, LAFD will finalize preparations to distribute 200,000 sandbags and 50 tons of sand to strategic locations throughout the

City. LAFD has made sandbags available at all fire stations, and sand is available at 35 fire stations.

LAFD will also pre-load K-rail and sandbags into department trailers, and stage them in preparation for rapid deployment. K-rail barricades will be staged at the Sepulveda basin and other at-risk locations.

- **Police Department**

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is continuously engaged in preparing their personnel for potential incidents and disasters and is participating in cross-department workshops and discussions ahead of the anticipated rainy season. LAPD is including safety tips in their internal Emergency Preparedness Bulletin to inform personnel on steps to take in extreme wet weather, including information on wet weather driving and the hazards associated with flowing water and rising water. Additionally LAPD will be holding a Department Emergency Coordinator Meeting in October focusing on El Niño and storms/floods.

During severe weather, LAPD will also work with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (DOT) to make decisions regarding storm related road closures. They will also work with other City departments to determine evacuation decisions and facilitate any evacuations that may be ordered.

- **Emergency Management Department**

EMD is responsible for the coordination of Los Angeles' emergency planning, training, response, and recovery efforts before, during, and after major disasters and significant incidents. As such, EMD is in a constant cycle of preparedness and outreach for both specific hazards and broad disaster preparedness to our community members and to our City departments.

Ongoing processes and efforts that contribute to our City's readiness for this El Niño weather event include the review and maintenance of all-hazards plans, functional plans, hazard-specific plans, and assisting all City departments in the development of their department-specific Continuity of Operations Plans and Department Emergency Plans. EMD also leads training efforts for City employees to effectively respond to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and assist in incident management and coordination, regardless of disaster type.

EMD coordinates and manages activation and staffing of the EOC and has developed pre-set levels of activation with specific staffing requirements for City departments in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the City's Emergency Operations Plan and annexes. This includes activation scenarios for major urban flooding, debris flows, adverse weather and tsunamis. The staffing level and EOC concept of operations is focused on identifying critical Citywide response and recovery issues in advance of the hazard.

The EOC will be activated in advance of the first El Niño related storms as a proactive measure with emphasis on emergency public information and notification, gathering of situational awareness, coordination of available resources on a Citywide and regional basis, and specific operational objectives such as warning, evacuation, transportation, mass care and shelter, damage assessment and continuity of operations and government. The EOC will also collect and disseminate timely information to elected officials, department heads, and field personnel.

If evacuations are determined to be necessary, EMD will work with Unified Command and within the EOC to oversee all aspects of evacuation, including mapping, messaging, and sheltering. While the exact location and scope of evacuations cannot be predicted at this time, existing plans, policies, and procedures guide decisions on evacuation orders and state roles and responsibilities for City departments if evacuations are ordered.

With regards to community outreach and engagement, EMD's Community Emergency Management (CEM) Division pushes emergency preparedness throughout the communities of Los Angeles through speaking engagements, participation in local emergency exercises, and participation in emergency fairs sponsored by neighborhood councils, homeowners associations, houses of worship and large employers. At these events CEM hands out educational materials on emergency preparedness and engages directly with individuals who represent their individual communities and neighborhoods. It encourages residents to prepare for the worst case catastrophic earthquake by creating an emergency plan, gathering emergency supplies, and building emergency kits. By preparing for the worst possible disaster, residents will be prepared for other hazards and incidents, such as severe storms. It also encourages them to register with NotifyLA and to consider implementing the 5 Steps to Neighborhood Preparedness plan which will enable them to respond and support their community during a disaster.

Some of CEM's preparedness materials include information on food safety during power outages and severe storms, and a homeowner's guide for flood, debris flow and erosion control. As we head into the winter months, CEM will adjust its messaging to emphasize the potential threats that the El Niño condition is creating and how to mitigate against them.

CEM will plan, with LAFD and LAPD, a series of Town Hall meetings in each Council District, again, to inform residents of the threat that El Niño brings to our City. These meetings will speak directly to the threats in each area of the city that is vulnerable to the impacts that severe rain and wind create. These meetings will take place before the end of the year.

Furthermore, the EMD Communications Division has several ongoing, all-hazards public messaging efforts:

- **NotifyLA** is the City of Los Angeles' official emergency public messaging system. Residents, commuters, and visitors can register for free emergency alerts sent to email, cell or home phone.
- **ReadyLA** is EMD's website for preparedness and emergency information. The site provides information about hazards the City faces, ways for individuals, businesses, and communities to get prepared and respond during or after a disaster, and more.
- **Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)** come through the national emergency alert system to send concise, text-like messages to users' mobile devices alerting them of imminent threats. Users receive these alerts based on their location relative to cell towers in a targeted area.
- **5 Steps to Neighborhood Preparedness** is a program designed to help self-identified communities come together to develop and exercise an emergency plan that utilizes community resources and training to better respond to and recover from a disaster.
- **Prepare LA Now** is a web application that enables households or organizations to input basic information that is used to generate a personalized emergency plan
- **Social Media** accounts such as our @ReadyLA Twitter and Facebook pages allow us to directly communicate crisis information, preparedness program information and other events to the community. They also allow us to interact real-time with anyone who might have questions about El Niño, emergency preparedness, or other issues.

EMD has been engaged in publishing El Niño related messaging across social media as it becomes available, including forecasting from the National Weather Service, general personal and community preparedness, and El Niño-specific messaging generated by EMD and other departments, including LAFD and the Department of Public Works, Bureau of Street Services.

Additionally, in coordination with the Community Emergency Management Division and Communications Division, EMD constantly highlights the message of preparedness at community events, such as the Valley Preparedness Fair, the September Go Kit Emergency Event for National Preparedness Month, and the California Earthquake Authority Partnership Preparedness Event at Dodgers Stadium.

- **Department of Public Works**

- Bureau of Sanitation
  - The Bureau of Sanitation (LASAN) submitted a detailed report to the City Council on September 17, 2015 regarding El Niño preparations for the Bureau. LASAN annually prepares a Wet Weather Preparedness and Operations Plan ahead of each wet weather season. This year, LASAN has inspected and maintained all critical elements of the storm drainage system in anticipation of El Niño, and stands ready to deploy personnel to inspect areas prone to flooding during severe weather to ensure they continue to operate properly. Sanitation also oversees the cleaning of catch basins, debris basins, and storm drains, channels, and culverts. During the rainy season, cleaning of these systems increases

and LASAN monitors the build-up of debris to prioritize cleaning and inspections.

During a storm, LASAN appoints a department Storm Commander responsible for tracking the storm's progress and monitoring the overall situation and its impacts to LASAN. LASAN may also consider the termination of trash pickup services in those pre-identified flood-prone intersections/streets on days with heavy downpours and flooding, in order to protect the public and LASAN workers by minimizing the risk of trash cans being blown over, causing accidents and spilling trash that plug up catch basins and storm drains.

- Bureau of Street Services  
The Bureau of Street Services (BSS) is the primary agency for debris management within Los Angeles. They will assist efforts by pre-deploying K-rails in areas deemed at risk for debris flow or mudslides, and will assist in street closures by providing barricades. Additionally BSS can have extra crews on hand to respond to wet weather, and will work with other City agencies to determine the need for additional crews ahead of wet weather. BSS regularly and extensively works with County Public Works to maintain capacity for mutual aid for debris management.
- Bureau of Street Lighting  
The Bureau of Street Lighting (BSL) meets yearly with City departments to coordinate the closure of the Sepulveda Basin. When the Army Corps of Engineers notifies the City and recommends closure of the basin to vehicular and pedestrian traffic, BSL removes streetlights from service, and returns them to service after flood danger has passed. For El Niño, BSL will coordinate with City departments and outside stakeholders for any location in the City which floods.
- Bureau of Engineering  
The Bureau of Engineering (BOE) has geotechnical experts who will respond to significant rain incidents to assess saturation rates on hill sides. Using this information, the geotechnical experts will work with LAFD to determine imminent threats and advise on recommendations for evacuations.

- **Department of Water and Power**

The Department of Water and Power (DWP) regularly prepares to respond to outages regardless of cause. For El Niño, DWP will support City efforts to respond to severe weather, including deploying personnel to restore power outages caused by storms.

- **Department of Transportation**

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has held an executive strategy meeting to discuss their department's readiness for El Niño and the rainy season. Additionally, they will conduct a Winter Storm table top exercise in October with department personnel to detail plans, procedures, and strategies related to El Niño conditions.

Additionally, DOT will work with other City departments to make street closure determinations and coordinate route changes if necessary because of severe weather as a result of El Niño. To inform personnel, DOT will ensure that all bulletins, correspondence, and preparedness advice they receive from other City departments to DOT staff members.

- **Department of Recreation and Parks**

As part of mitigation efforts, the Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) is currently identifying shelter and evacuation sites in areas of the City that may experience flooding due to the effects of El Niño. RAP will serve as the lead City department for sheltering and evacuation sites if evacuates are ordered within the City. RAP staff at facilities in and around flood zones and channels will be educated by the RAP Emergency Management Coordinators about hazards that may occur due to the effects of El Niño and how to respond to them. El Niño-specific information will be provided to RAP employees through their Public Information Division.

RAP is also deploying sandbags to facilities in areas historically at risk for flooding, and installing K-rails and other portable barriers in areas throughout Griffith park that are prone to flooding and run off. RAP facility roofs are being assessed, and repairs prioritized prior to El Niño. During severe weather, RAP will continue to work with other City departments in responding to and staffing our EOC, and will lead City mass care efforts. They will also have equipment crews identified and ready to rapidly respond to emergencies such as floods, fallen trees, and other occurrences during severe weather.

## **Summary of Challenges**

- **Situational Awareness**

With any hazard, natural or man-made, there are unknowns and variables. With El Niño, we cannot know far in advance the timing and severity of storms. Recognizing that we cannot predict, in detail, how a storm will move or how it will impacts specific parts of Los Angeles, EMD, along with City department partners and external stakeholder agencies will work together to plan, prepare, train, and exercise for all hazards. With El Niño, we will be constantly working together to ensure that our information is up-to-date, comprehensive, and actionable. Our work in previous incidents allows us to work together to anticipate problems, address concerns, develop a common operating picture, and act quickly to mitigate the damages to our community.

- **Action Items**

- For the City  
Under the coordination of EMD, City representatives and departments will continue to attend El Niño workshops, train EOC responders for their role in an incident, and constantly monitor the situation and information coming from meteorologists and weather service personnel in order to make informed decisions regarding preparation and response.

Additionally, efforts are ongoing within EMD to work with other departments to pre-map historical flood areas and overlay these areas with trash pick-up locations and power, gas, and water systems.

- For Community Members  
Through social media and community outreach events, community members will be encouraged to:
  - Sign up for NotifyLA
  - Follow the National Weather Service and City platforms on social media
  - Pay attention to local media
  - Check drainage issues at homes and businesses, including gutters, backyards, driveways, etc.
  - Clean up debris or litter on or near your property that may be washed away in a storm and plug up storm drain inlets
  - Check emergency kits and replace missing items and add items previously not necessary
  - Secure outdoor items that may move during water flow or flooding
  - Check on neighbors, family members, and others with disabilities and access and functional needs to encourage preparedness and develop support networks

- **CONOPS**

As detailed in emergency plans, policies, and procedures and as practiced through numerous trainings, drills, exercises, and real-world incidents, the City of Los Angeles will establish a unified command during El Niño incidents. City departments, including EMD, LAFD, and LAPD, will work together to make joint decisions, direct priorities, and work from a common operating picture.

One major component of our City's unified effort to respond to major incidents is the staffing and activation of the EOC. Ahead of major storms, EMD and our partners establish staffing contingency plans, and err on the side of activating the EOC proactively. This proactive approach to activating and using the EOC allows us to respond rapidly and aggressively if situations worsen or storms intensify. The EOC then serves as the hub of situation analysis and incident prioritization where personnel execute existing plans.

The City of Los Angeles prepares for events like El Niño through regular trainings, drills, and exercises both within departments and across multiple departments and agencies. Furthermore real-world responses to fires, storms, major planned events, active shooters, and other incidents further prepare our



departments and our personnel for any hazard that may come our way, whether it be El Niño, an earthquake, or a public health emergency.

- **Messaging**

Our current messaging is based on general personal and community preparedness: if you're prepared for a big earthquake, you're prepared for almost anything that could happen in the City of Los Angeles. As we move closer to the rainy season, when public attention and interest in action will be higher, EMD will roll out more El Niño-specific preparedness and action messaging, including:

- Storm forecasts and other weather information
- Community-directed messaging, especially those communities below recent burn scars and communities in low-lying or flood-prone areas
- Emergency information, such as warnings issued by the National Weather Service and advisories from City response agencies such as EMD, LAFD, LAPD, DWP, and Public Works.
- Using 311 phone line or My311 application to notify the City of any debris that could block storm drains to create flood or cause injury or damage if picked up by moving water. (211 is the Countywide service referral network and is available through the City 311)
- Availability of sandbags, how to use sandbags, and who should use sandbags.
- Personal home preparedness, including cleaning out gutters, flood insurance information, and securing of large items that could be swept up by rushing water such as patio furniture, trash bins, etc.

During any storm, EMD will push out advisories and alerts issued by the National Weather Service or our partners within the City through social media, Nixle, and NotifyLA. EMD will use these platforms, as well as coordinate with traditional media and City public information offices to push messaging related to evacuation, sheltering or available post disaster assistance, if necessary.

### **Closure**

In summary, EMD will, in coordination and collaboration with City departments and external stakeholders, continue to prepare and plan for a heightened El Niño weather pattern this Winter. Outreach efforts to community members will continue to highlight the need for personal preparedness and will inform community members about the available resources provided by the City. EMD will continue to report back to Public Safety Committee and the City Council as appropriate.