

# Homeowners Beware – Scientists Predict A Severe El Niño This Winter

By Michael Dicks, Esq. and Christopher Coglianese, Esq.

“El Niño” (pronounced “el neen-yo”) is a weather condition that can spell disaster for Southwestern United States residents. Flooding, mudslides, coastal erosion, earth movement and massive property damage have been familiar repercussions of previous El Niño winters in California and other Southwestern states. Present conditions indicate a severe El Niño is developing and could produce severe precipitation here this winter. In fact, this winter could see the most severe El Niño in fifty years!

## What Exactly Is El Niño?

Translated literally, “El Niño” means little boy in Spanish. Peruvian fishermen who call the Christ Child “El Niño,” first gave this name to the weather pattern that mysteriously caused their fish supply to disappear every few years around Christmas time. El Niño refers to an abnormal state of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific that causes huge climate changes around the world. El Niño is second only to the seasons themselves in determining worldwide weather patterns.

## How Is The Weather Different During El Niño?

The unusually warm ocean surface temperatures associated with El Niño alter the typical weather patterns for many areas of the world, including the West Coast. Because of the very warm ocean temperatures present during El Niño, anticipated rain is taken from some areas and dropped on other areas. It also pushed the Jet Stream farther south.

In both California and Arizona, El Niño is known for bringing frequent and numerous winter storms with torrential rainfall. The impact of the rainfall varies between the North and Southwest, usually affecting one or the other but not both areas simultaneously.

The most recent El Niños occurred during 1982-1983, 1986-1987, 1991-1993, 1994-1995 and 1997-1998. During the 1994-1995 El Niño, for example, the extremely heavy precipitation in California alone resulted in over \$3 billion in property damage and 27 lives were claimed by floods.

What has been called the “mother of all El Niños” occurred during the winter of 1982-1983. In that year, rain fall was almost double the annual average. Areas of the Southwest experienced massive flooding, road washouts, deaths and millions in property damage from the 1982-1983 El Niño. Most of the Southwest received 200% to 300% of normal annual precipitation that winter. Not surprisingly, the net result was flooding, mudslides and extensive erosion.

## Why Do Scientists Predict An El Niño This Year?

During the past several months, the ocean surface temperatures off of South America have been steadily rising and the normal trade winds have actually reversed direction.

These facts suggest that the Southwest could experience a severe El Niño this winter. Chile, which usually sees heavy precipitation during an El Niño year has been getting drenched. Scientists sometimes say that the summer weather in Chile is a good predictor of California’s weather six months later. While no one can predict with certainty whether an El Niño will bring abnormally heavy rainfall, it becomes more likely when the signs point to a strong El Niño as they do this year.

El Niño can be devastating to California and Arizona homeowners, as it was in previous El Niño winters. Property owners who are vulnerable to erosion, water damage, flooding, mudslides or earth movement should seek expert advice in how best to prepare for the coming El Niño winter. In addition, homeowners and homeowner associations should perform pre-winter inspections to confirm that their roofs, decks, and other exterior surfaces are not defective and are functioning properly. The cost of prevention is almost always much less than the cost of losses from unusually heavy rain.

If you suspect that your homeowner association, condominium or townhome property may have defective conditions, Dicks & Coglianese will perform a cursory inspection for your development with a general contractor or architect and advise you of the findings, at no charge.

Michael D. Dicks, Esq. and Christopher Coglianese, Esq. are principals with Dicks & Coglianese, a law firm specializing in representing homeowners and homeowner associations with construction defect claims. Dicks & Coglianese has offices located in Orange, San Diego and Ventura Counties of California, as well as Arizona offices based in Phoenix and Tucson.



1.800.739.1222