EL NIÑO 2026-2027 BCDC EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE
November 4, 2026

Please find BCDC's strategy for addressing El Niño conditions this 2026/2027 winter season consistent with the Governor's Proclamation of a State of Emergency signed on September 21, 2026. This strategy was discussed with the Commission at the October 15, 2026, Commission meeting. For information on how to apply for an emergency permit, please go to https://www.bcdc.ca.gov/programs/permits/how-to-apply-for-an-emergency-permit/.

If you have any questions, please email info@bcdc.ca.gov.

While BCDC is not specifically mentioned in Governor Newsom's State of Emergency Proclamation regarding both pre-flooding and emergency permitting, BCDC's strategy is consistent with the timeliness requirements in Section 9 of the Proclamation pertaining to the California Coastal Commission as well as Section 3 pertaining to California Natural Resources Agency departments prioritizing work to help local agencies prepare for anticipated very strong impacts from El Niño events. BCDC will use its existing authorities to prepare for and respond to flooding, recognizing that flooding will occur from the San Francisco Bay and watershed. BCDC will learn from this El Niño season to prepare for future storms and future flooding caused by sea level rise.

BCDC's strategy for addressing El Niño conditions this 2026/2027 winter season is as follows:

Minor Temporary Actions

- Hand-placement of small sandbags, "quick dams," and/or other temporary flood barriers that do not require engineering or ground disturbance, to protect people, residences, and businesses – and that when in place do not pose a risk to Bay resources – will not require a BCDC permit.
- Placement of such barriers should not block public access if possible and, if not possible, temporary public access detours should be provided.
- Barriers must be removed no later than April 30, 2027 (assuming the end of winter storms and expected El Niño ramifications) – using these smaller/minor temporary barriers is not a long-term storm/flooding/RSL adaptation strategy.
- Upon removal of any temporary protection measures within a public access area, the public access area shall be restored to the previously existing or improved condition prior to the temporary actions.

More Intensive Temporary Actions

- These include larger protective measures such as large sandbags (bulk bags) and other temporary flood barriers that may require using heavy equipment or specialized knowledge to install and otherwise would require a permit in non-emergency situations to protect people, residences, and businesses on and along the shoreline.

- BCDC will not require a permit for temporary placement of these protective measures so long as the protective measure(s) does not block public access or, if not possible, temporary detours should be provided.
- All such measures must be removed no later than April 30, 2027 (assuming the end of winter storms and expected El Niño ramifications).
- Upon removal of any temporary protection measures within a public access area, the public access area shall be restored to existing or improved condition prior to the temporary actions.
- Property owners must submit a permit application for continuing authorization if the owner intends to maintain the protective measure beyond April 30, 2027 – BCDC will encourage owners to prepare near-term and medium-term plans for future large-scale storms and flooding to adapt to rising sea levels.

In-Bay and Other Actions

- Placing revetments (e.g., rip-rap), bolstering and/or repairing levees, and pursuing other larger-scale emergency actions to limit damage pre-incident and/or repair damage post-incident requires a BCDC emergency permit.
- An emergency permit is necessary and appropriate to authorize this category of work because the types of preventive measures described above have the potential to adversely affect Bay resources, so it is imperative that BCDC has the ability to review these projects, impose permit conditions to protect those resources, and to track the work undertaken to ensure permit condition compliance.
- BCDC's regulations allow the Commission to issue emergency permits under specified conditions, specifically an imminent threat to life or property, and BCDC staff have consistent experience issuing emergency permits when warranted.
- Receiving an emergency permit generally requires coordination with regulatory staff; and submission of a map/specific location, a written and relatively short project description, and pictures of the damage.
- Direction by the Executive Director and the Chair of the Commission to staff to issue an emergency permit generally is secured immediately upon receipt of complete project information. BCDC staff is then generally able to issue the emergency permit within 24 to 48 hours after that point.
- In exceptional cases when the emergency necessitates action prior to when the emergency permit can be issued, verbal consent to begin work may be given, followed by issuance of the emergency permit to ensure accountability of the work being undertaken.
- To review an emergency situation, the following information is needed:

    a. the location of the emergency and proposed work (address, nearest cross street, or other landmark);

b. the site conditions, nature of the emergency (e.g., property, essential public services, or persons threatened due to an identified reason), and photo(s) or video documentation of emergency/site conditions, if possible;

c. the work to be performed (e.g., involving “x” feet of shoreline, levee with “y” cubic yards of material);

d. proposed start and completion dates;

e. evidence of property ownership and authorization to undertake proposed work (the latter if applicant is different than property owner);

g. contact information for local government point of contact with direct knowledge of the emergency and proposed work; and

h. any existing BCDC authorization permit numbers.

- An emergency permit requires a permit processing fee (https://www.bcdc.ca.gov/programs/permits/how-to-pay-the-bcdc-permit-application-fee/) and may include reasonable terms and conditions, potentially including an expiration date for the authorization following abatement of the emergency conditions, and a requirement that the permittee submit a new, regular permit application to continue allowing any expired authorization as may be modified to ensure full consistency with BCDC’s laws and policies after the emergency conditions have abated.