

Expect a Pleasant Early Fall 2016, *Probably*

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by Mark Biever, Thurston County Environmental Monitoring Program

On tap for the fall and winter 2016, Neutral or La Niña conditions are coming to the Pacific Northwest. That means we can expect moderate weather this fall with slightly above average temperatures and below average precipitation.

La Niña follows the El Niño model closely, but the warm-water “blob” that we saw off the Washington Coast last year is back in a more modest form, so this will throw some uncertainty into the mix. Learn [about El Nino](#).

The Global Effects of El Niño: Violent Storms

The much-hyped 2015-2016 El Niño that developed in the equatorial Pacific was a powerhouse that put a huge amount of energy into the oceans. This is the energy that predominantly drives the weather engine for the northern half of the earth.

During this summer, the Northern Hemisphere was punished with prolonged, record high temperatures, violent storms and increased Pacific Ocean typhoons. Between May and September there have been four super typhoons (which are category 5 hurricanes) that swept through the western Pacific causing catastrophic damage to some Asian countries and Pacific Ocean island nations. There were multiple hurricanes generated from the tropic zones off of Mexico that have been wandering in the mid Pacific Ocean around Hawaii almost all summer. In fact, there were three active hurricanes at one point in August, and parts of Europe have seen record high temperatures. Globally 2016 is set to be the warmest year on record. This will be the fifth year in a row that the record is broken.

The Local Effects of El Niño: May was Warmer and Drier than July

What effect did the strongest ever recorded El Niño have on our weather here in Thurston County? The answer is ...not much. We experienced a warmer and drier-than-average spring after a warmer, slightly wetter winter. In fact, May was drier, and generally warmer than July. Looking back in the books I could not find a precedent for this in the past fifty years for Olympia.

These warm and dry spring conditions were a continuation of the 2015 trend – and they extended into the first part of June when we saw three days above 92 degrees causing many forecasters to believe that we would have a repeat performance of the 2014 and 2015 record-breaking summer heat. These two previous years began in much the same ways, so it was reasonable to assume we were on track to beat that trend.

But for those of us in Western Washington, the trend that began in May and spread into June slowed and reversed by the first week of July. By early July we slid back into

temperatures in the 70s and precipitation began falling a couple days after the 4th of July. Anyone who has lived in Western Washington for a while would realize that this trend is actually backwards because there is so much truth in the slogan many of us grew up saying, "Summer starts on the 5th of July." So we went through July waiting and hoping for some hot summer weather, but that didn't arrive until July was almost done.

August brought back the heat reaching 100 degrees on August 19th in some areas. In comparison, during the summer of 2015 many locations hovered near 100 degrees for over a week and we received about 25 percent normal precipitation leading to a declaration of a drought last year. Although we were prepared to extend our drought plans expecting the worst, the copious late winter rain we received kept us in a low level drought not atypical of any given summer.

To say that El Niño does not matter would be misleading. It matters a lot. But for this past summer in our tiny corner of the world it just didn't show its head like the forecasters predicted.

What to Expect for Late Fall and Winter: Stay Tuned

Next month I'll tell you more specifically what is likely to happen weather wise and what we can expect for fall and winter based on the current state of weather statistics and the developing conditions off the coast. Whatever happens, the Thurston County Environmental Monitoring Program will be tracking it, recording it and using data we collect to help predict and plan for future events.

We are always watching the earth, sky and water so you don't always have to.

About the Environmental Monitoring Supervisor

Mark Biever is a Washington native and Program Supervisor for Thurston County's Environmental Monitoring. He's also a licensed geologist and a licensed Engineering Geologist.

All of the numbers used in this article come from the Thurston County Environmental Monitoring Program, which is part of the Thurston County Stormwater Utility. Learn more on our main monitoring web page www.co.thurston.wa.us/monitoring/.