

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

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Contra Costa: Forecast of rainy winter prompts safety warnings from officials

By Karina Ioffee kioffee@bayareanewsgroup.com

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Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, right, watches as public works department maintenance worker Zeke Esquivel demonstrates proper sandbagging technique in Richmond, Calif., on Monday, Dec. 21, 2015. The demonstration was part of a press conference to raise awareness about the dangers surrounding rain-swollen creeks. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group) (Kristopher Skinner)

RICHMOND -- Contra Costa County officials are using the forecast of a rainy winter to urge residents to be prepared by knowing where to pick up sandbags, and steps they can take to prevent flooding and monitor rain levels.

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The county has launched a website, www.cccounty.us/5906/Flood-Preparedness, where residents can look up sandbag locations and measures to prevent having their property flood, including cleaning gutters and removing leaves and trash from inlets and creeks near their and their neighbors' homes.



Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia, right, watches as public works department maintenance worker Zeke Esquivel demonstrates proper sandbagging technique in Richmond, Calif., on Monday, Dec. 21, 2015. The demonstration was part of a press conference to raise awareness about the dangers surrounding rain-swollen creeks. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group) (Kristopher Skinner)

"Most creeks in the county are the responsibility of private homeowners," said Mike Carlson, assistant chief engineer with the Contra Costa Flood Control and Water Conservation District.

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"The county will help you with sandbags, but we also expect you to help us out because we can't be everywhere at once."

San Francisco Bay water levels are already up to 12 inches higher than normal due to warmer waters, caused by El Niño, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. In addition, king tides, or large ocean swells, are expected this week and will contribute to the higher flood risk.

As rains continue, officials are worried about landslides, especially in hilly areas already prone to erosion. Soil is essentially a sponge that can only absorb a certain amount of moisture before flooding starts, officials said.

"Right now the sponge is somewhat dry, but once hillsides get saturated, water just runs off them," Carlson said. "We're getting close to the full saturation rate, and there's going to be a lot of runoff and flooding."

The flood control district reminds residents to store paint and other toxic materials under roofs to prevent contact with stormwater and discharge into local waterways. Trash bins should also be closed, and dripping pans should be placed under leaking vehicles, equipment and work areas.

Other precautions include not driving around road barriers and being sure to report downed power lines to PG&E or the police. Residents should also not attempt to enter canals and drainage ditches to clear leaves and debris, but instead notify their local public works department.

County rainfall levels are available online at gismap.ccmmap.us/FloodControl/Hydrology.html. Contact Karina Ioffe at 510-262-2726. Follow her at [Twitter.com/kioffee](https://twitter.com/kioffee).

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Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia speaks about the availability of sandbags for county residents during a press conference to raise awareness about the dangers surrounding rain-swollen creeks in Richmond, Calif., on Monday, Dec. 21, 2015. (Kristopher Skinner/Bay Area News Group) (Kristopher Skinner)

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