

California Department of Water Resources NEWS

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CONTACTS:

- [Pete Weisser](#), Office of Water Education -- (916) 653-9712
 - [Jay Punia](#), Chief, DWR Flood Operations Branch -- (916) 574-2611
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California Flood Fighters Are In Good Shape For The Winter Flood Season

SACRAMENTO----California flood-fighters are well-prepared for the upcoming flood season, according to State water officials.

Intensive training, closer coordination among flood-fighting agencies and experience gained fighting major floods in 1995, 1997 and 1998 have improved the ability of California officials to battle flooding.

This was reported today by Jay Punia, Chief of the Flood Operations Branch for the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

"We are well-prepared," Punia told members of The Reclamation Board today. "The last two years have been extremely productive for improving flood emergency response."

He said new emergency response training, better communications among emergency response agencies and the lessons learned in the recent year floods "have brought DWR's flood fighting capability to its highest point this century."

In updating the board on DWR preparations, Punia cited several improvements, in addition to excellent progress on the usual seasonal tasks of channel clearance and levee maintenance and repairs. DWR has:

* Given improved emergency management training to 185 DWR staffers. This training

enables them to use the Standardized Emergency Management System mandated for multi-agency response to emergencies.

* Scheduled six flood fight training classes to teach flood fighting techniques to key DWR and local maintenance agencies' personnel.

* Appointed a new Emergency Preparedness Manager, experienced in supervising major water facility emergency repairs. He heads DWR's emergency planning and is the key preparedness liaison with other emergency response agencies involved in flood-fighting.

* Improved flood-related computer communications, including an enhanced home page for the California Data Exchange Center, which provides basic flood information to many flood fighters and partner agencies.

DWR already has conducted a series of pre-season flood coordination meetings in Chico, Stockton and Sacramento with local flood control agencies. DWR flood officials on Oct. 15 held a strategy and planning meeting with other key emergency response agencies, involving OES, California Conservation Corps, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the California National Guard.

DWR Deputy Director Ray Hart introduced Punia's briefing. Hart noted that a La Niña winter weather pattern may bring California intense storms, but perhaps with longer dry intervals between storms than was the case last winter, an El Niño winter. Hart said California's major reservoirs are drawing down to winter levels required for flood control, with no extraordinary releases of water expected.

Levee repairs from the 1997 flood are more than 95 per cent complete, and levee repairs from the sustained high water in 1998 are underway, reported Rod Mayor, Chief of Integrated Flood Management for DWR.

All critical repairs are scheduled for completion this year, reported Mayor. Non critical repairs will be completed next summer.

DWR, the US Army Corps of Engineers and local districts are working closely in achieving the levee repairs.

Leslie F. Harder, Chief of DWR's Division of Engineering, reported that a review of major 1997 repairs to Central Valley levees shows that the repairs "were overall a story of success." This was an unprecedented level of effort and was completed in a minimal time to complete the work by the following flood season, noted Harder.

A levee review board of four engineers reported that over 500 sites were repaired, and many were

quickly tested by high flood flows in 1998. None of the repairs failed, though some did require repairs during the 1998 flood, and some sites do require further work.

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The Department of Water Resources operates and maintains the State Water Project, provides dam safety and flood control and inspection services, assists local water districts in water management and water conservation planning, and plans for future statewide water needs. The State Water Project provides water to two-thirds of California's population.

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