

Powerful thunderstorm rolling into central San Joaquin Valley

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/02/27/3794126/more-rain-in-san-joaquin-valley.html>

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Dorothy Clark, a field supervisor contracted by Pacific Gas & Electric, adjusts a road closure sign at N. Arthur Avenue along N. Weber Avenue where a power pole is down Friday morning, February 28, 2014 in Fresno, Calif. Clark said Fresno police first received a report of a tree and power poles down around 6am. ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE

Storms expected Friday will likely pack a punch, with some of wildest weather the central San Joaquin Valley has seen this winter.

Strong winds, hail, thunderstorms and "even a weak tornado" are possible on the Valley floor, according to National Weather Service meteorologists.

At 7:45 a.m., Pacific Gas & Electric reported 31 power outages in the Fresno area affecting 3,400 customers. "We're on scene at many of the outages and hope to have the customers restored as quickly and safely as possible," utility spokesman Denny Boyles said in a statement. ([See PG&E's outage map](#))

The rain has already caused a major traffic tie-up in Bakersfield, where a tractor-trailer crash closed Highway 99 at Highway 58. The California Highway Patrol said it was not known when the highway might open.

Heavy rain in the Valley and snow in the Sierra are expected, but should taper off into the weekend.

"We're thinking these storms will be a little stronger than what we normally might see," said meteorologist Jim Bagnall with the National Weather Service office in Hanford. "We might get larger hail and stronger winds."

As of 8:30 a.m., the weather service reported the Fresno area had received 0.49 inches of precipitation overnight and Friday morning. Other totals: Hanford, 0.50; Madera, 0.51; Yosemite Valley, 0.67; and Sequoia National Park, 1.01.

A National Weather Service winter storm warning went into effect Thursday night, and will continue through 4 p.m. Saturday for elevations above 6,000 feet.

Up to three feet of snow is likely in the high Sierra on Friday, Bagnall said, with a couple inches of snow possible as low as 5,000 feet in elevation.

The latest storm is the second of three systems. The first blew off the coast on Wednesday, Bagnall said. This second wave should mean rain through Saturday in the Fresno area, with partly sunny skies expected Sunday. After that, a third band of rain might brush the Fresno area Wednesday night into Thursday.

As of Thursday afternoon, Fresno's seasonal rainfall total (rain years run July 1-June 30) was 2.83 inches -- much lower than the 7.74-inch average the city should have received by late February, Bagnall said.

On Thursday, China Peak Mountain Resort in Lakeshore reported 6 to 9 new inches of snow, and Badger Pass Ski Area in Yosemite National Park reported 6 fresh inches.

In Los Angeles, mandatory evacuation orders were issued for about 1,000 homes in two eastern foothill suburbs beneath nearly 2,000 acres of steep mountain slopes left bare by a January fire.

The state Department of Water Resources took a new survey of the Sierra Nevada snowpack and found the water content at only 24% of average for the date. The northern and central Sierra snowpack normally provides about a third of the water used by California's cities and farms.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. spokesman Denny Boyles, who is based in Fresno, said maintenance crews will be at full staffing early Friday to prepare for any downed power lines due to high winds.

Boyles offered some tips for staying safe during the storm:

-- Stay away from downed power lines and immediately call 911, then notify PG&E at 1-800-743-5002, and keep candles away from children and flammable materials, like drapes and lampshades. If you have a stand-by generator, notify PG&E and make sure it's installed safely to avoid damaging property and endangering PG&E workers who could be working on power lines in your neighborhood.

-- If power goes out, unplug or turn off electric appliances to avoid overloading circuits, which can cause fires when power is restored. Leave a single lamp on to indicate when power returns. Turn appliances back on one at a time when conditions return to normal.

To help residents combat heavy rain, Visalia officials announced sandbags and sand is available outside the corporation yard, 335 N. Cain St. Visalia residents should bring their own shovels to fill bags. For more information, call (559) 713-4428. Visalia residents with flooding concerns can call (559) 713-4403.

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