



The Little Boy Steps Up

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), El Niño (Spanish for “little boy”) is expected to be a dominant climate factor that will affect U.S. weather this winter. El Niño occurs when the sea surface temperature in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean near the equator is warmer than normal. This occurs periodically, about every two to seven years. This El Niño is expected to strengthen to a moderate level and impact the Northern Hemisphere this winter. El Niño changes the strength and position of the jet stream over the Pacific Ocean and the U.S.

Slower Hurricane Season

El Niño has already influenced Florida by reducing the amount of tropical activity in the Atlantic basin this year. Florida was not impacted by any hurricanes in September, which is usually the peak month in terms of hurricane activity in the Atlantic basin. El Niño creates a vertical shear over the hurricane forming regions in the Atlantic. This shear tends to break up potential hurricanes before they form. This pattern also tends to increase the number of winter storms.

La Niña, the opposite of El Niño, occurs when cooler water occurs near

the equator in the Pacific. Because of fewer shearing winds, La Niña tends to allow more hurricanes to form.

Wetter Winter

NOAA and the Southeast Climate Consortium predict that the Southeast will have a wetter, stormier, and cooler winter than normal because of El Niño. While not all the winter storms will create tornadoes, there is the possibility of more tornado activity in the Gulf Coast area this winter. Bart Hagemeyer, Meteorologist-in-Charge of the NOAA Melbourne office, pointed out that the top two deadliest tornado events in Florida occurred during El Niño winters. One tornado killed 42 people in the Kissimmee area in February 1998 during a strong El Niño, and another tornado killed 21 people in Central Florida during a weaker El Niño in February 2007.

A strong subtropical jet stream is often associated with El Niños, and this leads to a higher probability of a wetter winter in Florida, Texas, and California. In contrast, it is expected to be drier than normal this winter in the Pacific Northwest and the Ohio and Tennessee River Valleys.

Cooler Winter

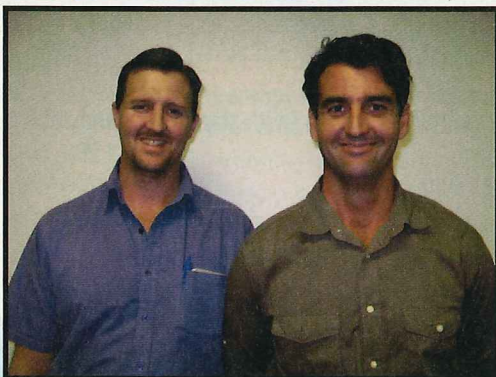
The Southeast is expected to be cooler than average from December through April. Cooler areas will range from the Texas gulf coast through Florida and the mid-Atlantic up to southern Pennsylvania. At the same time, much of the western and central U.S. will be warmer than normal, particularly in the north-central states from eastern Washington to Wisconsin. Periodic cold air outbreaks are possible even though this area is

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