

Wet winters tend to lessen threat of wildfires

By Paul Rogers, San Jose Mercury News



Regardless of how wet the winter, fire officials often broadcast the same warning as summer begins: “Prepare for a bad fire season.”

If it didn’t rain much, they say conditions are bone dry. If it rained a lot, they often say the tall grass translates to lots of fuel.

So what’s the real story?

A *Mercury News* analysis of rainfall and fire records over 40 years shows the worst fire seasons come after dry winters, not wetter ones like the one we’ve just had.

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Ranked by acres burned, 12 of California’s 15 worst fire seasons back to 1970 – including the four very worst – all occurred in years after drier-than-normal winters, according to the analysis.