

Climate change could bring twice as many big El Niños

By Sammy Roth, Desert Sun

Scientists have long wondered whether rising global temperatures will lead to an increase in intense El Niño events, like the one that could bring major storms to Southern California this winter. According to a groundbreaking study published Monday, the answer is a resounding, “Yes.”

If human beings don't slow their emission of planet-warming greenhouse gases, extreme El Niños could nearly double in frequency – from once every 28 years to once every 16 years on average, the new study found. That could spell trouble for California, which experienced mudslides, flooding and \$500 million in damage during an intense El Niño in the late 1990s.

The idea that global warming will lead to stronger El Niños makes perfect sense, said Bill Patzert, a NASA climatologist who was not involved in the study. That's because El Niños are driven largely by warming water in the tropical Pacific Ocean, which will get especially hot as the world temperatures rise.

An increase in extreme El Niño events will probably be accompanied by an increase in extreme La Niña events, which lead to dry winters in California.

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