The new reality: Emergency season is year-round



Report
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BC Hydro
Power smart

Executive summary

The line between wildfire season and storm season is disappearing in B.C.

The risks British Columbians face are becoming increasingly connected. The wildfires and persistent heat that shaped the summer of 2026, along with prolonged drought conditions across Southern B.C., are expected to continue influencing conditions long after the last fire is extinguished. Trees weakened by the dry weather may not fail until they're exposed to winter storms. Landscapes altered by wildfire can become more vulnerable to flooding, erosion and landslides when fall and winter storms return. At the same time, the potential development of what's become known as a 'super' El Niño could add another layer of uncertainty to the months ahead. The result is a new reality: emergency risks are becoming increasingly interconnected, and preparedness is no longer seasonal.

Highlights:

- **Emergency season no longer follows the calendar,** with summer drought and wildfire conditions continuing to shape risks well into the fall and winter.
- **Tree-related outages remain BC Hydro's biggest reliability challenge,** with drought and wildfire damage increasing vegetation risks during severe weather.
- **The consequences of wildfire persist long after the fire ends,** creating ongoing hazards from weakened forests, landslides and drainage challenges.
- **A strong El Niño could amplify weather extremes,** bringing warmer temperatures and potentially more intense storm activity.
- **Proactive investment and preparedness reduce impacts,** strengthening system reliability and improving customer resilience during emergencies.

Solutions:

To help reduce outage risks and restore power faster during storms, BC Hydro has:

- **Enhanced storm response operations** by strategically pre-deploying crews and improving dispatch processes based on lessons learned from previous storm events.
- **Expanded vegetation management** by tripling annual investment over the past six years to approximately $150 million to remove trees and vegetation that pose a risk to power lines, particularly as drought conditions continue to weaken trees.
- **Improved outage detection** through smart meter technology, helping crews locate outages quickly and speed up restoration efforts.
- **Strengthened weather forecasting** capabilities using advanced meteorological modelling to better predict storm impacts and position crews and resources where they are needed most.
- **Enhanced customer communications** through improved digital outage tools and more frequent updates before, during and after major weather events.

Customers can also take simple steps to be prepared for storm-related outages:

- **Build or update an emergency kit** with enough supplies for at least 72 hours, including flashlights, batteries, first-aid supplies, non-perishable food and water.
- **Know where to get outage information**, including downloading the BC Hydro app and using BC Hydro's outage map for real-time updates.
- **Stay safe around downed power lines** by always assuming they are live, staying back at least 10 metres and calling 911 immediately.

Fire response to storm readiness
The same conditions reshaping emergencies are changing how BC Hydro prepares for them.

During the 2026 wildfire season:

1,265
power poles were replaced

110
transformers were replaced

As wildfire response winds down, many of the same crews transition directly into storm preparedness and response.

From wildfire season to storm season

Think storm season starts in the fall? In many ways, it starts in the summer.

Across British Columbia, the drought and wildfires of summer 2026 may continue to influence emergency risks for months to come. Trees stressed by drought can be more vulnerable during windstorms. Burned landscapes can face increased risks from flooding, erosion and landslides when heavy rain arrives. And weather patterns influenced by a potential El Niño could add another layer of uncertainty to the season ahead.

The story of this year's storm season isn't just about the weather forecast. It's also about the conditions left behind by the summer.

Understanding those connections is becoming increasingly important as emergency risks evolve from isolated seasonal events into a year-round cycle. Because in today's British Columbia, storm season is no longer defined by a date on the calendar. More often, it's shaped by the summer that came before it.

Why summer conditions matter

When people think about storm season, they often look to the first major windstorm or atmospheric river of the fall. In reality, many of the conditions that drive storm-related impacts begin taking shape months earlier.

Across British Columbia, drought, prolonged periods of heat and wildfires are increasingly influencing the risks communities face long after summer ends. According to BC Hydro meteorologists, prolonged dry conditions can weaken trees even when there are few visible signs of stress. A tree that appears healthy in August may be far more vulnerable to failure when exposed to high winds, heavy rain or saturated ground conditions later in the year.

This matters because trees remain the leading cause of storm-related power outages across much of the province. On Vancouver Island and the South Coast, where windstorms and atmospheric rivers regularly affect electrical infrastructure, drought-stressed trees can increase the likelihood of branches and entire trees falling into power lines during severe weather.

The impacts extend beyond forests. In many Interior communities, wildfire can fundamentally alter landscapes by damaging vegetation and root systems that help stabilize slopes and absorb rainfall. When heavy precipitation returns, those burned areas can become more susceptible to flooding, erosion, debris flows and landslides, creating additional risks for communities, transportation corridors and critical infrastructure, like power lines.



The lasting legacy of wildfire

The end of wildfire season does not necessarily mean the end of wildfire impacts.

Some wildfire damage can take months or even years to fully emerge. Trees weakened by fire may remain standing long after flames have been extinguished, only to fall during subsequent windstorms or periods of heavy rain. Burned watersheds and landscapes can continue to change over time, affecting how water moves through the environment and influencing the severity of future weather events.

These long-term impacts demonstrate how emergency risks are becoming increasingly connected and why assessing future storm risk requires understanding the conditions left behind by previous events.



The link between tree health and outages

For BC Hydro, trees provide one of the clearest examples of how summer conditions can influence winter reliability.

While major windstorms often trigger outages, the underlying vulnerabilities may have developed months earlier. Prolonged drought can weaken root systems and reduce a tree's ability to withstand severe weather. Wildfire can leave trees structurally compromised even when they remain standing.

When high winds, heavy rain or saturated soils arrive, branches and entire trees may fall into power lines, damaging equipment and disrupting service.

Understanding and managing those risks remains one of BC Hydro's most important reliability priorities.

What forecasters are watching: The El Niño wild card

While no seasonal forecast can predict exactly what the months ahead will bring, one of the biggest factors meteorologists are watching is the potential development of a what's been called a 'super' El Niño.

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate pattern that can influence temperatures, precipitation and storm activity across British Columbia. It is typically associated with warmer–than–normal winter temperatures, particularly along the coast, but its effects can vary from year to year.

Current forecasts suggest B.C. could see:

- **Warmer–than–normal temperatures** across much of the province.
- **Drier–than–normal conditions** in parts of southern B.C., and continued drought concerns in some regions.
- **Atmospheric rivers that may be less frequent, but potentially more intense.**

A warmer outlook does not necessarily mean fewer weather–related risks. A small number of powerful storm systems carrying significant moisture could still produce heavy rainfall, flooding, landslides and outages.

The weather itself remains uncertain. What is already known is that any storms that arrive may encounter forests and landscapes carrying the effects of summer drought and wildfire.

Building a more resilient system

Preparing for severe weather requires more than responding after an outage occurs. It means identifying risks early, strengthening vulnerable parts of the system and ensuring crews have the information and resources needed to respond quickly.

Across the province, BC Hydro is investing in vegetation management, operational readiness, advanced technology and forecasting to reduce outage risks and improve restoration times.

Managing B.C.'s biggest outage risk

Trees and vegetation remain the leading cause of storm–related power outages in British Columbia. As drought conditions place additional stress on forests across the province, reducing vegetation–related risks has become more important than ever.



To help mitigate these risks, BC Hydro has tripled its annual vegetation management investment to $150 million. Crews work year-round to identify and remove hazardous trees and vegetation near power lines, reducing the likelihood that severe weather will result in outages.

Vegetation management by the numbers

Transmission system

8,119 hectares
of right-of-way clearing annually

25,035
edge trees removed annually

$65.5 million
invested annually in transmission vegetation management

Distributon system

2.03 million metres
of routine maintenance clearing annually

27,300
hazard trees removed annually

$89.5 million
invested annually in distribution vegetation management

Strengthening storm response

When severe weather strikes, speed matters.

BC Hydro has enhanced its storm response capabilities by strategically positioning crews, contractors and equipment and refining deployment plans based on lessons learned from recent major weather events. These improvements help ensure resources can be mobilized quickly when outages occur, and restoration efforts can begin sooner.

Using technology to improve reliability

A growing suite of advanced technologies is helping BC Hydro respond more effectively to weather-related outages.

Smart meters provide near real-time information that help confirm outage locations more quickly, while advanced forecasting models and outage prediction tools help identify areas at greatest risk before severe weather arrives. Together, these tools improve situational awareness, support faster decision-making and help direct resources where they are needed most.

Applying lessons from wildfire seasons

Recent wildfire seasons have reinforced the importance of designing infrastructure that can withstand a wider range of extreme conditions.

The 2026 wildfire season provided a real-world opportunity to evaluate how infrastructure and mitigation measures perform during extreme events. In some areas, fire-retardant treatments and fire-resistant mesh helped protect transmission structures from wildfire damage, demonstrating the value of investments designed to improve system resilience.

The challenges of drought, wildfire and severe weather are helping shape long-term planning, infrastructure investments and system improvements across BC Hydro's network. By studying how the system performs during major events, BC Hydro is identifying opportunities to strengthen resilience and reduce future impacts on customers.



A burnt pole saved by wire mesh wrap on a transmission line in the East Kootenay region.

Before the next storm: Four steps every British Columbian can take

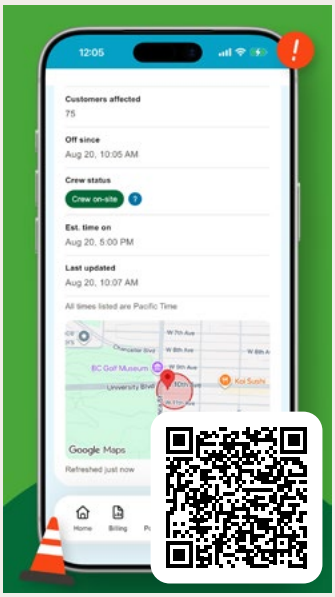
While no one can predict exactly what the months ahead will bring, a few simple actions can make a big difference when severe weather strikes.

Build or refresh a 72–Hour emergency kit: Include enough drinking water, non–perishable food, flashlights, batteries, medications and first–aid supplies to support everyone in the household for at least three days.

Create a household emergency plan: Make sure everyone in your household knows how they'll communicate, where they'll meet and what they'll do if power, internet or cell service is disrupted. Having a plan in place before an emergency occurs can reduce stress and uncertainty when it matters most.

Know where to get outage information: Download the new BC Hydro mobile app to access outage information and restoration updates directly from your phone. Customers can also use BC Hydro's online outage map for current information during an outage.

Stay safe around downed power lines: If you see a downed power line, always assume it is live and dangerous. Stay at least 10 metres away (about the length of a bus), keep others clear of the area and call 911 immediately. A downed power line should always be treated as an emergency, even if it is not sparking, smoking or making a buzzing sound. What appears safe can still pose a serious risk.



New this season: BC Hydro mobile app

Stay informed before, during and after severe weather with the new BC Hydro mobile app.

- Get outage and restoration updates tailored to your home
- Receive outage notifications directly on your phone
- View outage information across the province using BC Hydro's outage map
- Access your account, track electricity use and manage your bill from anywhere

The free app gives customers another way to stay connected during storm season and beyond, with home–specific outage information and restoration updates available wherever you are.

Scan the QR code or **click here** to download the BC Hydro mobile app. Available for Apple and Android devices.

A year–round approach to preparedness

The emergencies that affect British Columbia are becoming increasingly connected.

The droughts, heat waves and wildfires of summer can influence the storms, flooding and outages that follow in the months ahead. As seasonal boundaries become less distinct, preparedness must become a year–round effort.

While no one can predict exactly what this fall and winter will bring, understanding these connections and preparing accordingly can help reduce the impacts of severe weather on communities, customers and critical infrastructure.

For more information on power outage preparation visit **bchydro.com/staysafe**

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