

Brunt of storm on its way; flooding likely

By Kathryn Reed

With a wind advisory in effect through 4am Sunday, public works crews in the Lake Tahoe Basin will be patrolling streets through the weekend to make sure storm drains are not clogged with pine needles or other debris, which can cause streets to flood.

But there is nothing crews can do to stop the rivers in the region from rising.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is predicting the Truckee River will be close to 8 feet between 3am and 3pm on Sunday. Flood stage for the portion of the river along Highway 89 near the Placer-Nevada county line is 4.5 feet.

Officials are advising people to avoid traveling on Highway 89 between Truckee and Tahoe City.

Farther downstream, the level of concern is even more heightened.

The following are storm totals from the National Weather Service in Reno from 4pm Nov. 27 through 6pm Nov. 30:

“(Friday) morning, the National Weather Service issued a flood warning for the Truckee River area and Susanville,” said Aaron Kenneston, Washoe County emergency manager, said at a press briefing. “We are joining forces with our regional partners to declare a state of emergency in Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County in order to access state resources that can help us

Reno	1.47	inches (rain)
Incline Village	1.11	inches (rain)
Mammoth Lakes	26	inches (snow)
Kirkwood Mountain	22	inches (snow)
Sierra-at-Tahoe	19	inches (snow)

maintain public safety as we deal with the impact of this 25-year flood. Those resources include the Nevada National Guard, the Division of Forestry, and other agencies that specialize in emergency disaster management and relief.”

Sugar Bowl 12.0 inches (snow)
Alpine Meadows 9 inches (snow)
Upper Kingsbury Grade 8 inches (snow)

Storms keep rolling

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency inspectors were out Friday checking on projects and storm drains.

“While we don’t know right now if this was a 20-year storm, BMPs are engineered to handle 1 inch of rain in one hour, which equates to a 20-year storm event,” Jeff Cowen with TRPA told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The key is that the first hour provides the ‘first flush’ of pollutants. Once that first flush is captured, the stormwater following is much cleaner and less impactful.”

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a flood watch from this afternoon through Sunday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, eastern Alpine County and the Reno-Carson City-Minden area along and west of Highway 395. Heavy rain with high snow levels is expected to occur tonight through Sunday. This will increase the potential for minor flooding near creeks and streams.

Forecasters are calling for 3 to 5 inches of rain during this time period, with isolated amounts up to 7 inches along Highway 89.

With moisture comes the wind – with gusts expected to hit 120 mph on mountain passes.

Clearing the debris



Bobby Maxwell with South Lake Tahoe public works on Nov. 30 clears a storm drain on Ski Run and David. Photos/Kathryn Reed

In South Lake Tahoe the public works crews were driving all over town dealing with the more than two dozen usual problem areas along with the calls coming in from concerned residents.

By 3pm Friday a couple hundred bags of sand have been filled at the fire station near the Y. Bobby Maxwell with the city's public works department delivered more bags so people can protect their property.

A homeowner on Janet Drive did what he could to clear the water, but Mother Nature was winning. The vacuor truck is sent over to suck up the water and debris. Still, sand bags line his driveway while the water ponds on the far side of his street.

This is one of those low-lying parcels, where the street goes up in both directions and the property at the bottom is where the water collects.

The large vacuor truck is running all day – and will be this

weekend. When it's full the gunk is dumped in the Caltrans yard at the end of Sierra Boulevard.

The vactor mobile is also one of the tools the city has to help prevent clogs. It along with street sweepers is sent out before storms to rid roads of as much debris as possible.

Maxwell says curbs are a good thing; adding that Highway 50 is noticeably better in this storm because Caltrans installed curbs and gutters the last two years.

But Caltrans' work has caused problems for those on Fremont Avenue. The city had a pump there on Friday to help with drainage flows. Later in the afternoon the center was pumping water from below the parking lot on to Fremont Avenue with a fire-type hose.

Caltrans messed with the city's infrastructure in summer 2011 so the drainage is worse. It nearly caused the businesses in the Fremont Mall to flood last year.

Markers let the crews know what kind of drain is installed. DI = drain inlet, P = pipe, and DW = dry well. The latter don't work all that well because they can only hold so much water. A flooded street is usually the result of a dry well being overloaded, a low-lying area where all the water collects, or a flat area where there is no movement of water – it just puddles.

The drain inlets are where crews can take a metal rake to remove the debris to get the water flowing again.

At Tamarack and Ski Run the water is nearly across both lanes. Water is over the top of Maxwell's boots. But after a few swipes of the grate with the rake the water is spiraling down the drain. The road is wet, but there is no more standing water.

Along Lakeview Avenue where the city did improvements the last

two years it would be hard to know there had been a substantial storm. In winters past about 20 calls came in each season to let crews know water was accumulating.

While snow is more common in Tahoe this time of year than rain, the history books point to plenty of flooding in the area. The most recent significant event was New Year's Eve 2005.

"It seems like we are working harder in the winter because the storms are more powerful," Maxwell told *Lake Tahoe News*.

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Lights coming back on in Incline Village

Updated Nov. 30 10:20pm: NV Energy says power has been restored to roughly 3,900 customers affected by the power outage in the Incline Village area. Crews are still trying to repair the downed line believed to be the cause. They were able to reroute the power to that area temporarily.

— KTVN-TV

NV Energy reports all of Incline Village is suffering a power outage.

The outage affects just Incline, not the nearby towns.

Workers have not yet determined the cause of the outage but hope it is a small, isolated problem.

There is no estimated time of power restoration for Incline Village.

— KOL0-TV

Integrity of Internet is crux of global conference

By Eric Pfanner, New York Times

PARIS — A commercial and ideological clash is set for next week, when representatives of more than 190 governments, along with telecommunications companies and Internet groups, gather in Dubai for a once-in-a-generation meeting.

The stated purpose of the World Conference on International Telecommunications is to update a global treaty on technical standards needed to, say, connect a telephone call from Tokyo to Timbuktu. The previous conference took place in 1988, when the Internet was in its infancy and telecommunications remained a highly regulated, mostly analog-technology business.

Now the Internet is the backbone for worldwide communications and commerce. Critics of the International Telecommunication Union, the agency of the United Nations that is organizing the meeting, see a dark agenda in the meeting. The blogosphere has been raging over supposed plans led by Russia to snatch control of the Internet and hand it to the U.N. agency.

That seems unlikely. Any such move would require an international consensus, and opposition is widespread.

Terry D. Kramer, the former Vodafone executive who is the

United States ambassador to the conference, has vowed to veto any change in how the Internet is overseen.

Analysts say the real business of the conference is business. "The far bigger issue – largely obscured by this discussion – are proposals that are more likely to succeed that envision changing the way we pay for Internet services," Michael Geist, an Internet law professor at the University of Ottawa, said by email.

Hamadoun Touré, secretary general of the I.T.U., has repeatedly said that the U.N. group has no desire to take over the Internet or to stifle its growth. On the contrary, he says, one of the main objectives of the conference is to spread Internet access to more of the four and a half billion people around the world who still do not use it.

And yet, groups as diverse as Google, the Internet Society, the International Trade Union Confederation and Greenpeace warn that the discussions could set a bad precedent, encouraging governments to step up censorship or take other actions that would threaten the integrity of the Internet.

"This is a very important moment in the history of the Internet, because this conference may introduce practices that are inimical to its continued growth and openness," Vinton G. Cerf, vice president and chief Internet evangelist at Google, said in a conference call.

Google set up a Web site last week, "Take Action," encouraging visitors to sign a petition for a "free and open Internet." The campaign is modeled on the successful drive last winter to defeat legislative proposals to crack down on Internet piracy in the United States.

More energy is expected to be spent on how companies make money off the Internet. In one submission to the conference, the European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association, a lobbying group based in Brussels that

represents companies like France Télécom, Deutsche Telekom and Telecom Italia, proposed that network operators be permitted to assess charges for content providers like Internet video companies that use a lot of bandwidth.

Analysts say the proposal is an acknowledgment by European telecommunications companies that they cannot hope to provide digital content. "The telecoms realize that they have lost the battle," said Paul Budde, an independent telecommunications analyst in Australia. "They are saying, 'We can't beat the Googles and the Facebooks, so let's try to charge them.' "

The European lobbying group says that without the new fees, there will be no money to invest in network upgrades needed to deal with a surge in traffic. Regulators have required European telecommunications operators to open their networks to rivals, and the market for broadband is fiercely competitive, with rock-bottom prices.

In the United States, by contrast, most telecommunications companies have been permitted to maintain local monopolies – or duopolies, with cable companies – in broadband, keeping prices higher. And American regulators have ordered broadband providers to give equal priority to all Internet traffic. Such "network neutrality" is incompatible with charging content providers for moving their bits of data.

Analysts say this may explain why American telecommunications companies have not joined the European call for a new business model. "Models that try to force payment terms between nations and telecom operators run a huge risk of cutting off traffic," Mr. Kramer said in an interview. "Liberalized markets are the only way to expand the success of the Internet."

People who have been briefed on the conference submissions say that not a single European government delegation has endorsed the telecommunications operators' proposal, and the European Parliament has passed a resolution denouncing it. Only

governments, not private groups or companies, can put items on the meeting agenda.

While many documents prepared for the conference remain secret, several people who have seen submissions say there is broad support for Internet connection fees in French-speaking Africa and among Arab nations – countries in which many telecommunications companies are still owned or heavily regulated by governments.

Much of the attention before the 12-day conference has focused on a proposal from Russia that would effectively remove control of the Internet's infrastructure from a collection of decentralized and apolitical organizations, mostly based in the United States. "Member states," Russia proposed, "shall have equal rights to manage the Internet, including in regard to the allotment, assignment and reclamation of Internet numbering, naming, addressing and identification resources."

Those functions are performed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, a private organization with an international board that operates under contract with the United States government.

The Russian proposal was widely interpreted as a call to legitimize domestic censorship of the Internet. Yet analysts note that governments inclined to filter the Web, like China and Iran, have not waited for consensus in an international meeting to do so.

S. Tahoe officers on mission

to stop drivers from using cell phones

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department has teamed up with the California Office of Traffic Safety, U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, California Highway Patrol, and 36 other law enforcement agencies across the greater Sacramento region to eliminate motorists' handheld cell phone use and texting.

The effort is a special federally funded pilot program using the region to test tactics that may be employed nationally in the future.

Beginning today and lasting through Dec. 9, South Lake Tahoe officers will be out in force to issue tickets to drivers using handheld cell phones or texting. Nationally in 2010, 3,092 people were killed, and an estimated 416,000 others were injured in motor vehicle crashes involving a distracted driver.

Officers say because too many drivers still don't get the message that using a cell phone while driving can be dangerous and deadly, this initial distracted driving crackdown marks the first of many enforcement waves taking place over the next year.

California's distracted driving law bans all drivers from using handheld devices and texting while operating a motor vehicle.

Distracted drivers in South Lake Tahoe talking on a handheld cell phone or texting will receive a first-time ticket costing a minimum of \$159, with a second offense costing \$279. But the goal of the special enforcement operation is not to issue tickets, but to raise awareness of the dangers of distracted driving.

S. Tahoe makes vicious dog laws less restrictive

By Kathryn Reed

When South Lake Tahoe's vicious animal ordinance becomes law in mid-December, it will mean a loosening of government regulations.

The city has been studying the ordinance for several months per the request of Councilman Bruce Grego. He with Councilman Tom Davis made up the subcommittee that worked with staff to come up with the new language.

The ordinance was approved Nov. 20 and takes effect 30 days later.

The city was operating under El Dorado County's ordinance, which was modeled after the state regulations, but more restrictive. The state allows for cities and counties to create dog rules that are less restrictive.

"When there is a dog-on-dog fight it will not constitute a vicious dog," City Manager Nancy Kerry explained.

The current county ordinance says any dog caught off its property three times is vicious, any dog fight makes the animals vicious, and complaints by a neighbor against a dog could render it with the label of being vicious. These are the rules the five councilmembers agreed were too stringent.

Kerry said one of the major differences between the city and

county ordinances is judges will now have the discretion to look at the history of the dog's behavior and consider previous complaints. With the county regs, the judge has no discretion.

The new ordinance defines a potentially dangerous dog as:

- When unprovoked it bites a person;
- On two separate occasions in a two-year period unprovoked and off the owner's property, causes a person to act defensively to prevent injury.

A potentially dangerous dog does not include:

- A dog that bites or causes a domestic animal to act defensively to prevent injury if the animal was aggravating the dog;
- A dog that bites or causes a person to act defensively to prevent injury, if the person was committing a willful trespass on the owner's premises, was aggravating the dog, or was committing a crime;
- A dog that protects/defends a person on its immediate vicinity from unjustified attack.

Investment firm buying up houses in Sac, El Dorado,

Placer counties

By Hudson Sangree and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

An investment firm that owns the Waldorf Astoria hotel and the Weather Channel has bought more than 500 houses in Sacramento in the past few months, betting upward of \$60 million that home prices will rise.

Blackstone, a New York-based group with billions of dollars in investments and offices from London to Tokyo, has been snapping up low-priced homes across the region, from Elk Grove to Citrus Heights, at a rate of about 40 a week.

It marks the first time a major investment firm has bought in Sacramento on such a scale – a direct result of the thousands of houses left vacant by foreclosures in recent years and offered at fire-sale prices.

“Prior to the current housing cycle, it was essentially unheard of” for major investment funds to buy single-family homes, said Stuart Gabriel, director of the Ziman Center for Real Estate at UCLA. “The exodus from home ownership and the dislocation of homeowners has been unprecedented.”

Experts said the bulk purchase of single-family homes by Blackstone and other big investment firms could have a significant effect on Sacramento neighborhoods, pro and con.

The purchases may boost prices in the short term by clearing out distressed properties and create needed rental housing. But they could also alter neighborhoods once populated by owners rather than renters, and make it more difficult for first-time buyers to compete in today’s market.

Whether the entry of such large players is positive or negative depends in large part on how well Blackstone treats its tenants and maintains its piece of suburbia.

“The jury is out in this particular respect,” Gabriel said. “There’s a lot of asset management involved here. It could be more challenging than they expect.”

This year, across the United States, a number of big investment firms have been active in areas hit hard by the housing collapse. Blackstone, one of the largest, says it will spend about \$1.5 billion to buy 10,000 homes nationwide with the idea of renting them until prices increase enough to sell.

The firm calls itself the world’s largest real estate private equity firm, whose \$54 billion in assets includes shopping centers, hotels and office complexes.

But fixing faucets and collecting rent on single-family homes is a new strategy for Blackstone, which owns hotel giant Hilton Worldwide, has a major stake in T-Mobile parent Deutsche Telekom, and frequently partners with Mitt Romney’s old firm, Bain Capital.

Blackstone has embraced the plan with gusto.

“It’s a long-term investment for us,” said Philippa Brown, spokeswoman for Blackstone’s new housing division Invitation Homes.

Starting in May, the firm bought about 900 homes in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, Southern California’s Inland Empire, which saw a boom-and-bust cycle last decade similar to Sacramento’s.

Big player, small prices

Blackstone arrived in Sacramento in August, opening a Roseville office for its purchasing partnership, which operates under the name THR California and includes Invitation Homes.

The company wasted little time in becoming the largest purchasing force in the Sacramento foreclosure market,

spending more than \$60 million, according to a *Bee* analysis of county records.

Using local real estate agents, brokers and former house flippers, the company went from owning no homes here in August to owning 250 by mid-October.

House flippers who had to compete against Blackstone's buyers in auctions on courthouse steps began to grouse. They were regularly being outbid.

THR has paid, on average, a roughly 20 percent premium for homes, according to a *Bee* review of data from Zillow.com. In one case, THR purchased a 1,000-square-foot home in Meadowview for \$175,000, or roughly 80 percent more than Zillow estimates the home is worth.

"They're betting on appreciation," said Eric Peterson, managing director of Praxis Capital, a house-flipping and property management firm in midtown Sacramento. Blackstone's attitude, Peterson said, is "'I don't really care what I pay today, because I think it's going to be double that five years from now. Ten grand's not going to affect my return that much.'

"We don't necessarily disagree with their thesis, but our appetite for risk is much lower than theirs," Peterson said.

As of last week, tax records showed THR California owned 510 houses in Sacramento County. The firm added about 40 properties a week during the last three months – one in every 10 houses sold in Sacramento County in that period.

More recently, Blackstone has sped up the pace. During the first three weeks of November, the Sacramento County recorder's office showed THR bought 145 properties, almost 50 per week.

THR California also bought 22 homes in Yolo County, 21 in

Placer County and one in El Dorado County during the past three months, according to official records.

Most of the houses THR has acquired are relatively small, between 1,000 square feet and 1,800 square feet, and cost from \$75,000 to \$200,000. They are located mainly in distressed areas – such as North Highlands, Rancho Cordova and Galt – where sales prices have plummeted but rents remain relatively high, creating quick cash-flow opportunities.

In South and North Natomas, the company has purchased about 50 homes. The *Bee* visited a dozen last week. Some were dilapidated, with paint peeling and dead grass in the yard. Some were being fixed up by contractors with new carpet and sod. Others were neat and trim, with fresh paintwork and appliances, ready for new tenants.

Only one had a tenant in residence.

At his house on Regatta Drive in the city's Northgate neighborhood, John Coaxum, 50, gripped two eviction notices he had received from THR California.

Coaxum, whose rent is subsidized by Section 8, said he had lived in the house for 14 years and done much of the landscaping himself. His landlords used to be a local couple, but they lost the house to foreclosure.

When THR bought it from the bank, the company wanted more money, which he didn't have, he said. Coaxum said he called the company's number in Roseville and left messages but had not heard back.

Now he was facing the prospect of being tossed out.

"I'm not scared, I'm terrified," Coaxum said. "I raised all my kids here. I love my neighborhood. I have no delinquency. I don't know what's going down."

THR California has not yet filed any "unlawful detainer"

lawsuits in Sacramento Superior Court to force the eviction of tenants. But in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, where the company has been active a few months longer, THR California has filed more than 125 such lawsuits, court records show.

Tenants and toilets

Dealing with tenants in single-family homes is sure to pose challenges, even for a multi-billion-dollar behemoth.

It will be difficult to rehabilitate 500 houses in short order, Peterson said, and keeping them up won't be easy, either. Praxis manages 80 rental homes, and the coordinator's phone rings off the hook with complaints of leaking roofs and broken toilets, he said.

Profit margins that look great on paper can end up being offset by tenant and maintenance headaches.

"It's a lot to handle," he said.

That's why Blackstone's Invitation Homes has contracted with Riverstone Residential Group, one of the nation's largest managers of apartment complexes. The two companies now share an address in Dallas.

"We want our customers to be happy," said Invitation's Brown. "Those are their homes."

Brown, who just began her job two weeks ago with the startup company, said she could not answer questions about the Sacramento market or individual tenants. She referred questions about property management to Riverstone. Riverstone, in turn, referred all questions back to Brown.

Ryan Lundquist, a local property appraiser, said that how the properties are managed remains a crucial question. By purchasing en masse, Blackstone is helping boost neighborhood property values, but increasing the number of rentals is

potentially destabilizing, Lundquist said.

Whether the properties are kept up and rented to good tenants will affect values of neighboring homes, he said.

In Elk Grove, where Blackstone has bought about 40 houses, newly elected Mayor Gary Davis said he shares those concerns. He also worries about a future hit on home prices if Blackstone decides to sell its holdings all at once.

And he said the company's spending spree could squeeze out local residents who are trying to buy homes at today's low prices and interest rates.

"We have residents who are finally able to buy their first home or get back into a home after renting for a while," Davis said.

"When they have to compete with national investment companies," he said, "it makes it hard for residents to get a foot in the door and get their house."

Citrus Heights Mayor Jeff Slowey had a different take.

Blackstone's purchase of about 60 homes in Citrus Heights and surrounding communities is a good sign for local homeowners, he said. By investing, Slowey said, Blackstone is saying "they think it's a good market, and it's going to turn around."

Weather impacting schools on

Friday

Zephyr Cove Elementary School is on a snow day.

Unsafe road conditions at higher elevations is putting Incline Village schools on a two-hour delay Friday morning.

Black Oak Mine School District in El Dorado County is closed because it does not have electricity.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Forecasters on edge as storms hit Tahoe, Reno

By Kathryn Reed

RENO – Extra personnel have been called in to analyze the vast amount of data flowing into the multitude of computers at the National Weather Service office in Reno.

This storm that is upon Northern California and Nevada is expected to be a doozie, with drenching rains that could cause flooding in the Lake Tahoe Basin, Truckee, Reno-Sparks, and points south on Highway 395.

Of most concern to forecasters is how high the Truckee River will rise in Truckee and Sparks. Rivers are expected to crest on Sunday. All tributaries into Lake Tahoe are also being watched, with the Upper Truckee River being the largest one.

While it's quiet inside the confines of the weather bureau on Thursday morning, plenty of work is going on. Each workstation

contains several computers. Most have lots of color on the screens – an indication something other than sunshine is on the horizon.

One screen breaks down the predicted snowfall for the Sierra for the next seven days in six-hour increments.

Jon Mittelstadt, meteorologist in charge, points to the satellite data showing the “atmospheric river from Hawaii” that will bring the heavy rain to the region this weekend. “The satellite has a sensor for water vapor,” he explains.

It’s looking like after the brunt of the storm things will dry out for a few days before more moisture comes in late next week.

But the severity of this storm has Reno forecasters talking to FEMA, emergency management crews in California and Nevada, departments of transportation, law enforcement as well as hydrological partners.

Four television screens provide “situational awareness” for the team to keep track of various locales from a loop of Caltrans cameras over Donner Summit to what is going on at Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

The Reno office, which is one of 124 throughout the United States, handles the forecasts along the crest of the Sierra, Tahoe, and all of Washoe County to the Oregon border, and then points south of Reno. Neighboring offices are in Sacramento, Medford, Ore., Hanford, Elko and Las Vegas.

The River Forecast Center in

A winter weather advisory is in affect above 7,500 feet for Friday from 4am to 4pm. Six to 12 inches could fall at that level. It’s expected to be heavy, wet snow – making driving even more precarious. A flood watch remains in effect from Saturday afternoon through Sunday morning for the Lake Tahoe Basin, eastern Alpine County and the Reno-Carson City-Minden area. A period of heavy rain with high snow levels will occur Saturday evening through Sunday. Rainfall amounts

Sacramento handles all of the rivers. Saturday through Sunday morning of 3 to 5 inches are possible in the Lake Tahoe Basin, with isolated amounts up to 7 inches

Inexact science

It's necessary to staff the weather office 24 hours a day, seven days a week because things are always changing. Predictions can be made based on what the data says, but Mother Nature has a mind of her own. greatest risk for flooding are small creeks and streams along and west of Highway 395 from Lassen County, south through the Reno-Tahoe-Carson City area and into northern Mono County. Mud and rockslides are possible in areas of steep terrain and near recent wildfire burn areas. – National Weather Service, Reno

"If you get past five or six days, you can't have confidence in the forecast," Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Mittelstadt knows weather guys get a bad rap when they say one thing and another occurs.

One problem with being in the West is no one is in the Pacific Ocean feeding data to those on shore about what the storms are like. Satellites help, but they can only do so much. Ship reports come in, but they don't have data from the upper air.

Reno is all about seven-day forecasts. Of the 24 employees in that office, 15 are forecasters.

In his 20 years with the Weather Service, Mittelstadt has seen tremendous improvement with forecasts. Technology, including the Internet, has helped with that.

He said people are always working on ways to improve forecasting and improving computer models.

"Things happen in very small scales," Mittelstadt said. He pointed to how there may be a forecast for 6 to 12 inches of snow, but one area gets 2 feet. Being able to nail down more precise data to have predicted that 2 feet of snow is what

weather gurus would like to be able to do.

More than the daily weather

During the summer fire weather is the big deal. Wind, heat and humidity are the big factors forecasters study. They partner with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Reclamation.



It's going to be a long weekend for forecasters at the National Weather Service in Reno. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On big fires, a forecaster goes to the site.

Aviation forecasting – focusing on the ceiling and wind – is something pilots tap into. Forecasts are done for South Lake Tahoe, Truckee, Mammoth and Reno airports. In January, the Reno bureau will provide data for Carson City, too.

Throughout the world weather balloons are launched twice a day, at the same time. The hydrogen balloon starts off about the size of a mini van and then gets bigger as the atmospheric pressure decreases. Eventually it bursts. A parachute is deployed that gently guides the instrument to land.

The data being collected is transmitted to the nearest computer center.

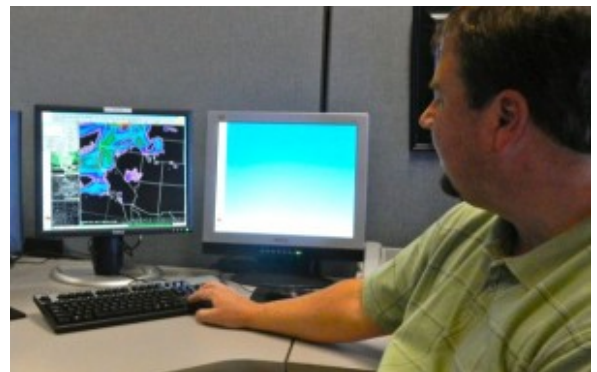
During Hurricane Sandy this fall every station in the United States launched the balloons four times a day to gather more timely information.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Washington deals more with climate concerns and long-term forecasting. Reno handles the weather and water – not the climate.

While the forecast from Washington is locally for a dry, warm winter, Mittelstadt said, “... it’s not a strong signal, so it could go either way.”

Storm precautions being taken

Randy Kelly with Liberty Utilities, which services the California side of the basin-Truckee-Alpine County, said, “We are definitely paying close attention to this storm.”



Meteorologist Jon Mittelstadt looks at data Nov. 29 showing the approaching storms.

His crews have been talking with emergency personnel from NV Energy in Reno and plan to keep in touch today “to see how everyone is doing and who needs help.”

A tree branch falling onto a line Thursday caused about 150 customers near the Y in South Lake Tahoe to be without power.

South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler has reached out to officials in El Dorado County Emergency Management Office.

The city has 10 free sand bags per household available behind

Fire Station 3 located at 2101 Lake Tahoe Blvd. (near the Y) and at Bijou Community Park near disc golf hole No. 1. Residents must fill the bags.

Sandbags are available at the Truckee Fire Protection District Station 92, 11479 Donner Pass Road.

In Placer County, sand bags are available at: North Tahoe Fire Station 52, 288 North Shore Blvd., Kings Beach; Placer County Department of Public Works Corporation Yard, 2501 North Lake Blvd., Tahoe City; Old Squaw Valley Fire Station, 1810 Squaw Valley Road, Olympic Valley; Northstar Community Services District Corporation Yard, 50 Trimont Lane; and North Tahoe Fire Station 53, 5425 West Lake Blvd., Homewood.

Washoe County School District has activated the district flood emergency plan.

Follow the Reno National Weather Service office online.

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This video from Kings Beach on Nov. 28 proves some people enjoy wild weather:

Lone South Tahoe pot club threatened with closure

By Kathryn Reed

Even though Tahoe Wellness Collective sought permits in October to renovate the facility to deal with the marijuana odor issue, South Lake Tahoe this week threatened the dispensary with closure.

Cody Bass, who runs the medical marijuana dispensary, said he has the contractors lined up and permits in hand. Bass told *Lake Tahoe News* he expects to have the remodel done by the end of the year.

What has the city upset is people continue to complain about the smell and this has been ongoing since TWC opened four years ago. While permits have not been required that entire time, now that they are all the rules must be followed – which includes running an odorless operation.

The notice given this week says Bass has 10 days to comply or he will be shutdown. He intends to appeal that notice. This buys him time to stay open and fix the problem until the council schedules a hearing. Ultimately it is up to the City Council now.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said she plans to meet with Bass on Friday.

Added to all of this is Bass was pulled over by a California Highway Patrol officer in October in Colusa County and subsequently arrested with allegedly 1.5 ounces of pot on him. The charges were possession of marijuana or hashish, possession for sale and driving with a suspended license.

If Bass were convicted of a felony, he could lose his permit to operate the dispensary per city regulations. Bass told *Lake Tahoe News* he does not believe a felony conviction is in his future.

Study: Bounce house injuries on the rise

By Michael Muskal, Los Angeles Times

Although they have become a popular staple at children's parties, inflatable bounce houses can be dangerous and are associated with a 15-fold increase in the number of injuries from 1995 to 2010, according to a study published in a scientific journal.

Writing in the journal *Pediatrics*, a group of researchers examined records from the federal National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, operated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. They looked at patients 17 years old and younger who were treated for injuries from inflatable bounce houses from 1990 to 2010.

"The number and rate of pediatric inflatable bouncer-related injuries have increased rapidly in recent years," they wrote. "This increase, along with similarities to trampoline-related injuries, underscores the need for guidelines for safer bouncer usage and improvements in bouncer design to prevent these injuries among children."

The study was co-authored by Meghan C. Thompson, Thiphalak Chounthirath, Dr. Huiyun Xiang and Dr. Gary A. Smith. All are affiliated with the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. Smith is the director.

Overall, an estimated 64,657 were treated 1990 to 2010, the researchers found. The numbers suggest 31 children a day in 2010 were treated in emergency rooms for broken bones, sprains and cuts from injuries in bounce-house accidents. That is the equivalent of one injured child every 46 minutes, they said.

Part of the problem is that the bounce houses have become increasingly more popular for parties and that means the number of injuries from children bouncing off of walls, floors and one another has risen. There were fewer than 1,000 injuries in 1995 but almost 11,000 by 2010.

“From 1995 to 2010, there was a statistically significant 15-fold increase in the number and rate of these injuries, with an average annual rate of 5.28 injuries per 100,000 U.S. children,” the authors said in the abstract of their findings. “The increase was more rapid during recent years, with the annual injury number and rate more than doubling between 2008 and 2010.”

Bounce houses can be rented for home or recreation center use. According to the findings, 43.7 percent of the injuries occurred at a recreation facility while 37.5 percent took place at a home.

A majority of injured patients, 54.6 percent, were male and the average age was 7.5 years old.