El Niño 2026–2027

Preparing Your Suffolk Business for Severe Weather

Extreme weather can disrupt businesses of all sizes — **flooding, storms, power cuts, transport problems** and **supply chain** delays can affect your employees, customers, premises and essential services. With a strong El Niño developing during 2026, now is the right time to review your emergency plans and consider how you would continue operating during unexpected disruption.

This guide explains what El Niño is, what it could mean for Suffolk, and the practical actions you can take before, during and after severe weather.

🌊 Be Informed

Understand El Niño, what it means for Suffolk and how to monitor weather warnings from trusted sources.

🏢 Be Prepared

Review your flood, storm, power and supply chain plans before disruption arrives.

💪 Stay Resilient

Build a business continuity plan so your essential services can continue, whatever the weather.

What is El Niño?

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon involving unusually warm ocean temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific. It forms part of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle and occurs every few years.

Although it develops far from the UK, it can influence the probability of wetter, windier or colder conditions during the British winter.

The Met Office confirms that a very strong El Niño event is likely, with a greater chance of unsettled UK weather during autumn and early winter and possible colder conditions later in the season.

Forecast for Suffolk

The Met Office three-month outlook for October–December 2026 indicated an increased chance of wetter and windier conditions across the UK. These are UK-wide probabilities, not a Suffolk-specific forecast — but they provide an important planning signal for local businesses.

40%

Wetter than average

Twice the normal likelihood of above-average rainfall for the period.

30%

Milder than average

1.5 times the normal likelihood. Colder conditions remain possible later in winter.

Cold Weather: Often Overlooked, Always Worth Preparing For

Although El Niño may increase the likelihood of milder early-winter conditions, the Met Office also identifies the potential for colder spells later in winter. Businesses should prepare for cold weather regardless of seasonal predictions — it is one of the most disruptive and frequently underestimated hazards for smaller organisations.

Before Cold Weather

- Service heating systems and check insulation
- Protect vulnerable water pipes against freezing
- Keep entrances, steps and walkways safe, arrange gritting
- Review staff travel policies and remote working options
- Assess how cold temperatures could affect stock, equipment and deliveries



During Cold Weather

- Monitor Met Office warnings for snow, ice and low temperatures
- Assess whether employees and customers can access premises safely
- Restrict access to unsafe car parks, pathways and external areas
- Maintain appropriate indoor working conditions throughout
- Consider flexible hours, changed operations or temporary closure where necessary

Flooding, Storms and Supply Chain Disruptions

Suffolk's coastal areas, river catchments, rural roads and low-lying agricultural land are vulnerable to weather disruption. Surface water, rivers, groundwater, coastal and sewer flooding all present real risks and businesses should assess the hazards relevant to their own site rather than assuming conditions are uniform across the county.

Flooding & Heavy Rainfall

Floodwater can damage premises, stock and equipment, affect access routes and delay deliveries. Surface-water flooding can happen rapidly, even away from rivers and the coast.

Storms & Strong Winds

Strong winds can damage roofs, signs, trees and external infrastructure — often with little warning. equipment, interrupt travel and affect overhead electricity

Power & Communications

Electricity outages can affect payment systems, refrigeration, production machinery, heating, lighting and communications — even a short interruption may have serious operational consequences.

Cold Weather, Snow & Ice

Colder spells later in winter could affect staff travel, cause frozen pipes and increase demand for heating and energy — particularly relevant if the El Niño pattern shifts as the season progresses.

Flood Preparedness: Step by Step

Flooding can occur with little warning, making early preparation essential to protect people, property and businesses. Suffolk County Council's *Flood Smart Living* guide recommends two approaches**: flood resistance**, to prevent water entering buildings, and **flood resilience**, to minimise damage and support faster recovery.

1 Understand Your Flood Risk

- Check whether your premises and access routes are at risk from rivers, the sea and surface-water runoff.
- Consider whether your site has flooded previously — including car parks, loading bays and nearby roads.
- Register for free Environment Agency flood warnings where available.
- Create a business flood plan that relevant employees understand and can act on.

Reduce the Damage Flooding Could Cause

- Install suitable flood barriers.
- Protect essential stock.
- Raise electrical equipment and sockets.
- Review drainage and guttering.
- Consider non-return valves to help prevent sewer backflow.
- Plan safe evacuation routes.
- Consider an independent property flood resilience survey before installing measures.
- Older and listed properties may need specialist consideration and permissions.

Know the Warning Levels and How to Respond

Flood Alert
Flooding is possible. Review your plan and make protection equipment ready.

Flood Warning
Flooding is expected. Protect people first, move critical equipment if safe and prepare to leave.

Severe Flood Warning
Severe flooding and danger to life. Move to safety immediately and call 999

ⓘ *Flood warnings do not cover all surface-water flooding incidents; also monitor Met Office weather warnings.*

During a Flood

- Always protect people first
- Follow emergency services' instructions
- Turn off utilities only if safe to do so.
- Never walk or drive through flood water

After a Flood

- Do not re-enter until premises are safe.
- Update your flood plan based on lesson learned
- Arrange professional electrical and gas checks.
- Photograph damage before cleaning.
- Contact your insurer promptly.
- Support employee mental health and wellbeing.

Supply Chain & Financial Disruption: Planning Ahead

El Niño can affect your business even when Suffolk itself experiences no significant weather event, such as potential disruption to agricultural production, international food supply chains and energy markets. Suffolk businesses involved in agriculture, food processing, hospitality, retail, manufacturing and logistics should pay particular attention to these risks, though the size and direction of these effects remains uncertain.



Delays in Imported Goods

Identify alternative suppliers and realistic delivery lead times before disruption occurs.

Review critical inputs sourced from potentially affected regions, including rice, coffee, cocoa and agricultural commodities.



Higher or More Volatile Energy Costs

Review energy contracts and any fixed-rate arrangements.

Consider energy-efficiency measures to reduce consumption.

Assess exposure to prolonged higher prices, especially for refrigeration, manufacturing or heating.

Increased Prices for Ingredients or Commodities



Review costs, contracts and stock requirements.

Prepare financial contingencies if input prices rise sharply or unexpectedly.

Discuss exposure with your accountant or financial adviser where appropriate.



Transport Disruption

Explore alternative routes, delivery companies and operating arrangements.

Identify which of your suppliers or customers could be most affected by road closures, port delays or logistics disruption, and plan accordingly.

Plan for severe-weather staff travel, including working from home.

Power Cuts & Building Your Continuity Plan

Power Cuts: Keeping **Operations** Safe

Before a power cut

- **Identify which activities would stop without electricity**
- **Keep torches, spare batteries and charged power banks available**
- **Consider uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) for critical systems**
- **Back up important business records and plan for offline access**
- **Prepare for interruptions to payments, alarms, heating and refrigeration**
- **Know how to contact your electricity network operator — the national number is 105**

5 Essential Actions During a Power Cut

Use torches
Use battery-powered lighting rather than candles to avoid fire risk.

Stay connected
Conserve mobile batteries and switch to backup communications where available.

Protect stored goods
Keep fridges and freezers closed and monitor food safety requirements carefully.

Check on people
Support employees and customers who may need additional help or assistance.

Report the outage
Call **105** to contact your electricity network operator and obtain outage updates.

After the Power is Restored

Check all essential equipment before restarting operations, particularly refrigeration, security systems and sensitive IT. Discard any chilled or frozen goods that cannot be confirmed as safe. Record the disruption and review whether additional backup arrangements are needed.

Six Steps to a Stronger Business Continuity Plan

A business continuity plan helps you prepare for disruption, continue your most important activities and recover as quickly and safely as possible. Continuity planning is especially important for small and medium-sized organisations, where formal arrangements are often least common. The question every business should ask itself:

If we could not access our premises or had no electricity for 48 hours, which activities would stop — and what could we do to maintain our essential services?



1 Identify Your Key Risks
Consider how flooding, storms, power cuts, cold weather and supply chain disruption could affect your premises and day-to-day activities.

2 Identify Essential Services
Determine the activities, staff, equipment, suppliers and systems that your business cannot operate without — your minimum viable operation.

3 Plan Alternative Arrangements
Consider temporary premises, remote working, alternative suppliers, backup equipment and emergency financial arrangements.

4 Assign Responsibilities
Decide who makes decisions, communicates with staff, contacts emergency services and coordinates recovery and ensure they know their roles.

5 Communicate and Practise
Make sure employees understand what to do and test important emergency procedures before an incident occurs.

6 Review and Improve
Update the plan after incidents, exercises or significant changes to your organisation. A plan that is never updated quickly becomes unreliable.

Your Preparedness Checklist & Essential Contacts

Use this checklist to review your organisation's readiness for winter 2026–27. Prioritise the actions most relevant to your business and premises. Internet and mobile services may be unavailable during severe weather.



Flooding & Premises

- Checked flood risk for our premises and access routes
- Signed up for relevant flood and weather warnings
- Inspected gutters, drainage and vulnerable external structures
- Identified suitable property flood protection measures
- Prepared or reviewed our business flood plan

Power & Essential Services

- Identified operations affected by power or water outages
- Prepared torches, batteries, power banks and contact lists
- Reviewed backup power and IT arrangements where needed
- Know how to report outages and utility emergencies (call 105)

People & Operations

- Agreed how to inform staff and customers during disruption
- Reviewed safe evacuation and temporary closure arrangements
- Considered vulnerable employees and customers
- Identified alternative suppliers and delivery arrangements
- Reviewed insurance and financial contingency measures
- Tested or reviewed our business continuity plan

Essential Emergency Contacts

Keep these numbers always printed and accessible during winter 2026–27.

Situation	Organisation	Contact
Immediate danger to life	Police, Fire & Ambulance	**999**
Power cut	Electricity network operator	**105**
Flood warnings & advice	EA Floodline	**0345 988 1188**
Flooding from rivers/sea or environmental incident	EA Incident Hotline	**0800 80 70 60**
Gas leak or emergency	National Gas Emergency	**0800 111 999**
Police non-emergency	Suffolk Constabulary	**101**
Urgent medical advice	NHS	**111**

Official Resources & Further Guidance

Suffolk Resilience Forum

www.suffolkprepared.co.uk — Local emergency preparedness, flood safety, power cuts and business continuity information.

Met Office — Weather Warnings

www.metoffice.gov.uk — Check the latest warnings for rain, wind, snow and ice. Sign up for WeatherReady alerts.

Environment Agency — Flood Information

www.gov.uk/check-flooding — View flood alerts, warnings, river information and business flood plan checklists.

Suffolk County Council

www.suffolk.gov.uk — Local flood risk management information and the Flood Smart Living guide.

UK Power Networks

www.ukpowernetworks.co.uk — Power cut updates and advice for electricity customers in Suffolk.

Who reports flooding?

Main rivers/sea: Environment Agency (0800 80 70 60).
Public roads/highway drains: Suffolk Highways.
Smaller watercourses/groundwater: Your local council.
Sewers/water mains: Your water company.
Immediate danger: 999.

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*For further information and to download this guide, visit **www.suffolkprepared.co.uk**.*