

High Quality Fence Releases Storm Season Guidance on Saturated Soil

September 02, 2026

MANTECA, CA - September 02, 2026 -

High Quality Fence has released guidance for property owners on preparing fence lines for a wet season that federal forecasters expect to be substantially wetter than normal across California. The company is directing attention to drainage, hardware, and the behavior of saturated soil under wind load, conditions that differ from the dry-weather concerns of the past several months.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center currently has an El Nino Advisory in effect, and in its August diagnostic discussion placed the odds of a very strong event during the Northern Hemisphere fall and winter at greater than 90 percent. The agency's seasonal outlook package issued on August 20 concentrates the heaviest precipitation signal over coastal California, with the strongest response expected to arrive between January and March.

The distinction matters for fence structures. Dry soil pulls away from a footing and reduces the bracing around it, while saturated soil creates a different problem: it loses lateral bearing capacity, meaning it resists sideways pressure less effectively even where the soil remains in full contact with the post.

That change becomes significant when wind arrives with the rain. A solid privacy fence acts as a continuous surface against moving air, and that load transfers to posts set in ground temporarily less able to resist it. Storm-related fence failures typically involve this combination rather than wind or water alone.

"Most fences that come down in a storm were not damaged by the wind by itself," said Moises Flores, Owner of High Quality Fence. "The ground was already soft, and the wind found the weakness that was there. Both things had to be true at the same time."

Portions of the valley floor contain a dense hardpan layer beneath the topsoil that restricts downward drainage, which can leave water standing in a post hole long after surface conditions appear dry.

Water management along a fence line is the element most often overlooked. Ground that slopes toward a fence rather than away from it concentrates runoff at the base of posts, and low points along a run can hold standing water for days after rainfall ends. Landscape irrigation adds to the total, particularly where sprinkler heads spray directly onto boards or pickets.

Wood in ground contact is affected most directly. Pressure-treated lumber is manufactured to resist decay under sustained moisture, though cut ends and drilled holes expose untreated interior wood unless sealed. Cedar and redwood offer natural decay resistance, but neither is immune to prolonged saturation at grade, and the section of a wood fence closest to the soil generally fails before the section above it.

Other materials respond differently. Vinyl does not absorb water, which shifts attention to the posts supporting the panels. Chain link systems depend on the zinc or vinyl coating over the mesh and framework, and sustained wetting accelerates corrosion wherever that coating has been damaged.

Hardware follows its own timeline. Hinges, latches, and screws exposed to repeated wetting and drying cycles corrode from contact points outward, and a hinge that binds during winter is often carrying rust that formed months earlier. Powder-coated ornamental iron holds up while its finish remains intact, with chips and scratches serving as entry points once sustained wetting begins.

Gates require particular attention before a wet season. A gate post carries the full weight of the frame and must resist twisting, so it responds to changes in soil condition sooner than a line post does. Automated gate operators add a further consideration, since the equipment and its connections sit at ground level where drainage determines how much standing water accumulates.

Property owners can assess much of this without tools. Flores noted that walking a fence line during or immediately after rainfall shows where water actually travels, which is difficult to determine once the ground has dried. Soft ground at the base of a post, staining at a consistent height above grade, and gates that have begun to bind are all worth noting.

"The best time to find a drainage problem is while it is raining," Flores said. "In August the ground looks the same everywhere. Two months from now the water shows exactly where it goes, and that is the information people need in order to fix anything."

Timing also favors earlier work. Repairs and maintenance involving staining, sealing, or hardware replacement require dry conditions and adequate cure time, and those windows narrow considerably once regular rainfall begins. Setting or resetting posts is likewise more straightforward before soil becomes saturated.

High Quality Fence is a family-owned fence contractor serving San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sacramento, and Contra Costa counties. The company installs and repairs wood, vinyl, chain link, and ornamental iron fencing, along with gates and gate operators, and holds California contractor license 1059161 in the C-13 fencing classification.

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High Quality Fence

High Quality Fence is a licensed, family-owned fence and gate contractor serving Manteca and the Central Valley since 2004. Led by owner Moises Flores, we install wood, vinyl, chain link, iron, and composite fences, gates, decks, pergolas, and gazebos.

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