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El Nino to fend off polar vortex — but snow could still fall

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LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

A pedestrian made her way down the City Hall Plaza steps on a dreary November day.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 03, 2015

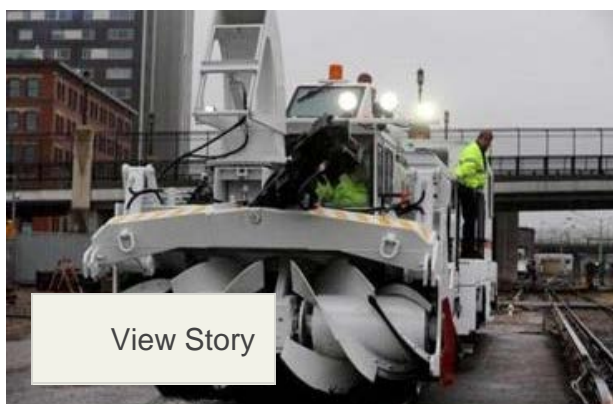
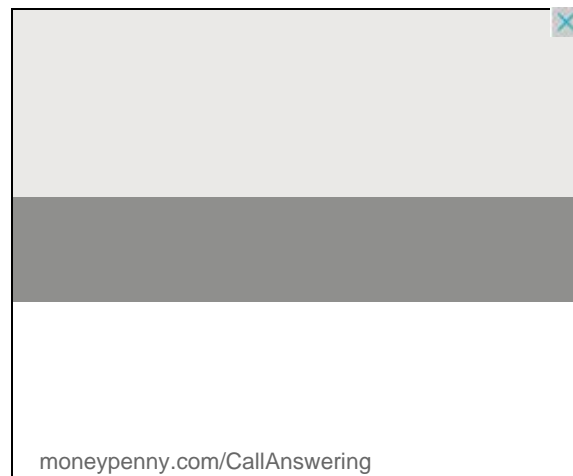
Forecasters expect the recent trend of mild weather to continue into January for large swaths of the country, including New England.

Meteorologists at AccuWeather.com did not rule out the chance for cold or snowy days entirely, but said that, generally, temperatures should be above average and snowfall below average for at least the next month.

Any snow that may fall will likely melt quickly, they said.

The predictions are good news for New Englanders still reeling from last winter, which featured harsh cold and recordbreaking snow. Of course, last year's snowy onslaught did not begin until the end of January so it might be premature to break out the champagne.

The weather experts said that a strong El Niño – an area with unusually warm sea surface temperature in the equatorial Pacific Ocean that can affect weather patterns around much of the world – will block arctic air from dipping into northern parts of the US.



Officials assure winter preparedness

The governor, the head of the MBTA, the mayor of Boston, and the director of Logan Airport all say they're prepared.

MBTA's slogan: 'Winter happens'

“El Niño is contributing to a strong belt of westerly winds across Canada that will help keep the polar vortex strong but locked up near the Arctic Circle,” said a statement from AccuWeather.com chief long-range meteorologist Paul Pastelok.

“We see impressive signals that the overall mild pattern that got rolling in the central and eastern states during October and November will hold through December and into January,” he added.

While long-range weather forecasting is far from an exact science, experts have said they expect the strengthening El Niño pattern to peak and then weaken sometime in late winter or early spring, but for now they are less certain of the timing and impact of that potential weakening.

“When El Niño starts to weaken, we do not always get an immediate change in the weather pattern,” Pastelok’s statement said. “We believe that once the current El Niño peaks, there may be enough of a lag to carry the warmth through much of the winter.”

In a monthly forecast for December issued on Monday, the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center said it, too, expects “exceptionally mild temperatures” to continue.

“Probabilities for above-normal temperatures exceed 70 percent across a large swath of the Midwest, Great Lakes, and Northeast,” the forecasters said.

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