



LEONIDAS HERNANDEZ, left, and Joseph McTigue work on the San Diego Zoo Safari Park float Tuesday.

Weather is elephant in the room

It hasn't rained on the Rose Parade since '06, but officials say they are ready for it.

By Alex Wigglesworth

More wet weather is on tap for Southern California this week, which may result in the first rainy Rose Parade in two decades.

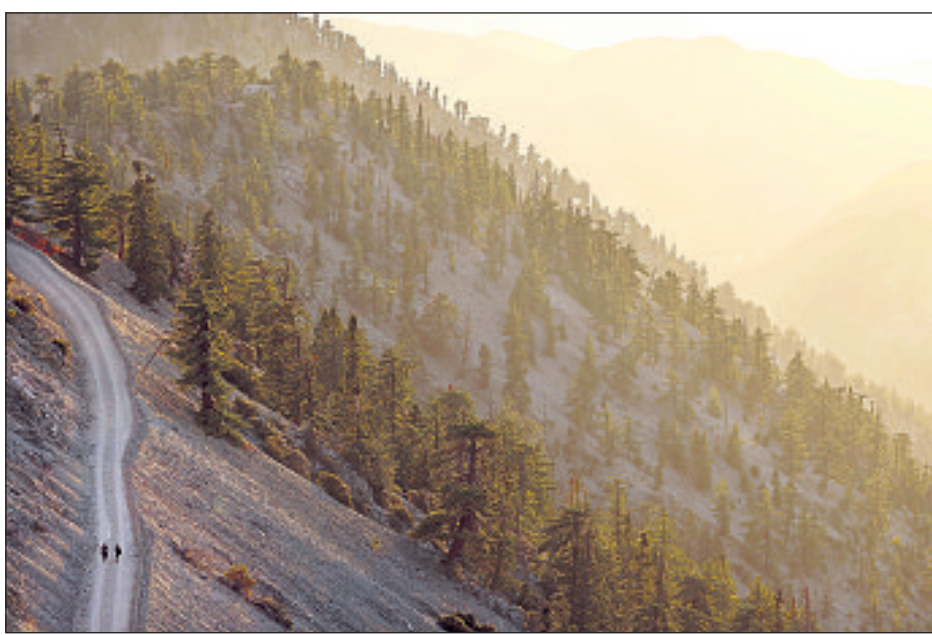
The rain is forecast to reach the Los Angeles area between sunset on New Year's Eve and the morning of New Year's Day, said Mike Wofford, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard. The heaviest precipitation probably will fall on New Year's Day and Saturday, with light showers the Friday in between, Wofford said.

In total, the storms are expected to drop 1 to 3 inches of rain in valley and coastal areas and 3 to 5 inches in the mountains — amounts that, although substantial, are less than what fell during the atmospheric river storms that caused flooding, debris flows and a tornado last week, Wofford said. Still, some flooding is likely, he said, since waterways are still swollen and soils still saturated from those earlier storms.

The weather could also create a soggy experience for the hundreds of thousands of people who flock to Pasadena each year to watch floats and bands wind their way down 5.5 miles of Orange Grove, Colorado and [See Parade, A9]

Early snowpack below average

The state's first survey of the season is disappointing despite recent storms. **CALIFORNIA, B1**



MT. BALDY, L.A.'s landmark backdrop, is one of the nation's deadliest peaks.

3 hikers dead on Mt. Baldy; calls grow for trail closures

Officials urge Forest Service to address dangers

By Alex Wigglesworth

Three people were found dead on Mt. Baldy, days after a winter storm blanketed the peaks of the San Gabriel Mountains with snow.

Around 11:30 a.m. Monday, search and rescue teams responded to a request to find an injured man, 19, who had fallen 500 feet while hiking near Devil's Backbone, a sharp ridge flanked by steep drops that leads to the summit, the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said in a news release. A friend traveling with the man had hiked to an area with cell-

phone service and provided GPS coordinates to rescuers, officials said.

A sheriff's air rescue team spotted the injured hiker, along with two other unidentified people, from a helicopter, but strong winds made it unsafe to carry out a rescue that day, the release states.

Around 7:30 p.m., a Los Angeles County airship was able to hoist down an air medic, who confirmed all three people were dead, officials said. Severe winds again prevented the helicopter from recovering them, the officials said.

"This heartbreaking incident is yet another reminder of the extreme dan-

gers posed by the mountain during winter weather and the urgent need for stronger preventative measures," San Bernardino County Supervisor Dawn Rowe said in a statement.

An operation to recover the three bodies was underway Tuesday, the Sheriff's Department said. The 19-year-old's identity was not released. The other two bodies had not been identified, and it was unclear how long they had been on the mountain, authorities said.

The incident adds to the mountain's grim record as one of the nation's deadliest and prompted renewed calls from elected officials [See Mt. Baldy, A9]

L.A. accused of ignoring state fire safety rules

The city permitted development in high-risk areas, lawsuit says, citing 75 examples.

By Noah Haggerty

The city of Los Angeles repeatedly ignored state wildfire safety regulations as it permitted new development in areas with severe fire hazards, a lawsuit filed Dec. 23 in L.A. County Superior Court alleges.

The lawsuit, brought by the State Alliance for Fire-safe Road Regulations and the Federation of Hillside and Canyon Assns., provided 75 examples of building permits and other plans approved by the city that the lawsuit alleges violate requirements known as the state's "minimum firesafe regulations."

The regulations require wide, flat roads with only short dead-end offshoots to ensure easy evacuation for residents and easy access for fire crews in fire-prone areas. They also require strategic fuel breaks to slow the progression of flames,

standardized fire hydrants and water sources to aid the firefight, and when practical, at least 30 feet between buildings and the property lines to limit the spread of fire between homes.

In 2021 the Legislature expanded the areas where these rules apply to include not only the wildlands where the state's firefighters respond to fires, but also "very high" fire hazard areas within cities such as Los Angeles. Yet fire safety watchdogs say the regulations are inconsistently enforced.

"It's so tragic that good legislation supported by clear direction from the state attorney general goes woefully ignored because oversight and enforcement are lacking," said Marylee Guinon, president of the State Alliance for Firesafe Road Regulations, a non-profit founded in 2021 to protect the minimum firesafe regulations. "Existing communities and future communities are at risk."

The lawsuit is the latest instance of fire safety watchdogs teaming up with residential groups to stop unrestrained development [See Fire, A9]

Some aid groups barred from Gaza

Israel is suspending about three dozen for not meeting new staff, funding data rules.

By Melanie Lidman and Sam Mednick

JERUSALEM — Israel on Tuesday said it will suspend more than three dozen humanitarian organizations, including Doctors Without Borders, for failing to meet its new rules to vet international organizations working in the Gaza Strip.

The Ministry of Diaspora Affairs said that the organizations facing bans Thursday didn't meet new requirements for sharing staff, funding and operations information. It accused Doctors Without Borders, one of the largest health organizations operating in Gaza, of failing to clarify the roles of some staffers whom Israel accused of cooperation with Hamas and other militant

groups.

International organizations have said that Israel's rules are arbitrary and could endanger staff.

Doctors Without Borders, also known as Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF in French, didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Israel previously accused its staff of involvement in militant activities in Gaza in 2024. At the time, the group said that it would never knowingly employ people engaged in militant activity.

Other major organizations whose permits weren't renewed include the Norwegian Refugee Council, CARE International, the International Rescue Committee and divisions of major charities such as Oxfam and Caritas, according to a list from the ministry. The organizations help with a variety of social services, including food distribution, health-care, disability services, education and mental health. [See Gaza, A4]

English teacher Jocelyn Medawar has noticed a new vibe at Harvard-Westlake School this school year: Upper school students are chatting in the halls and greet her as they enter class.

They no longer have their "faces glued to a screen," said Medawar, who has taught at the elite private school for 35 years. "The whole feeling on campus has generally changed."

At a time when school cellphone bans or limits are the law in California public schools and in at least 34 other states — a growing national movement to get distracted students off their devices and focused on learning — Harvard-Westlake has found a way to enforce their restrictions by turning to — what else? — a mobile app that partially locks down phones and flags the front office when students attempt to break the rules.

Students in grades 10 through 12 must install a custom-programmed app called "Opal" that blocks a list of social media and gaming apps that Harvard-Westlake educators have identi-

School uses app to fight addictive apps

Students keep phones but are no longer glued to them, officials say

By Iris Kwok



SINCE Harvard-Westlake bought the app, "the whole feeling on campus" has changed, a teacher says.

fied for now as scofflaws during school hours: TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, X, Discord, Threads, Pokemon Go, Roblox, Clash Royale and Reddit.

Students at the Studio City campus are allowed to keep their cellphones with them and can use them to contact parents or hail a ride only in an administrator's office.

But if a student disables Opal to use a banned app, school officials are notified on an office dashboard. The app represents one strategy designed to shore up the loopholes that have emerged in other popular enforcement tools, including lockable magnetic phone pouches that can be broken into or outright bans that sneaky students skirt.

After the first semester under the new rules, Harvard-Westlake school leaders reported promising results — and some students said they no longer are reflexively reaching for their phones and are sleeping better.

"The overall process ... [See App, A8]



IS RAIN TO BLAME?

Crews work on a ruptured natural gas line in Castaic. At least one expert said the big storm led to the break Saturday. **CALIFORNIA, B1**

USC playing in Alamo Bowl

For coverage of Tuesday night's game against TCU in San Antonio, go to latimes.com/sports.

Weather
Periods of rain.
L.A. Basin: 64/57. **B6**

Markets **A11**
Opinion Voices **A13**

Mickey Rourke faces eviction

The actor owes nearly \$60,000 in rent, his landlord says in court filing. **BUSINESS, A10**

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