



AudioLive TV

More monster waves will collide with the California coast after injuring onlookers and causing serious flooding

By Elizabeth Wolfe, Robert Shackelford, Mary Gilbert and Cindy Von Quednow, CNN

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(CNN) — A series of powerful storms in the Pacific Ocean are driving towering waves into the California coastline, triggering flooding and posing a significant risk to people and structures along the coast.

Monstrous, 20-foot-plus waves on Thursday crashed over seawalls and swept away and injured several people, forced rescues and sent a damaging surge of water through coastal California streets.

Dangerous waves continued to slam the coast on Friday, forcing beaches to close. All Ventura County beaches will be closed through New Year's Eve because of the 15- to 20-foot waves expected along the central and Southern California coasts through Saturday evening.

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A brief dip in wave heights may occur in some locations along the California coast during the daytime Friday as one storm pushes ashore, but the danger will quickly ramp back up later Friday and Saturday as another system develops behind it.

"Overall, this is expected to be an exceptional high-surf and coastal flooding event that has not occurred in many years," the weather service in Los Angeles warned.

San Diego, Orange County, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura County and San Francisco are all under high surf advisories of varying lengths.



Brian van der Brug/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images

A Ventura County, California, fire helicopter patrols the coastline over heavy surf south of Ventura Pier on December 28.

Sea levels have risen along most of the California coastline over the past century, NOAA data shows, as global temperatures climb and melt glaciers and ice sheets. Higher sea levels are making coastal flooding events worse and will continue to do so in the future.

The first round of dangerous waves hit alongside high tide Thursday morning. Several people were injured by a huge wave that slammed into Pierpont in the Ventura Beach area.

The wave crashed over a barrier along the Southern California beach, tossing a wall of fast-moving water at a group of onlookers who rushed to escape the deluge, video taken by Colin Hoag shows.

"Before I knew it, it was coming over the wall," Hoag told CNN.

Seawater quickly knocked some people off their feet and pummeled cars as drivers tried to speed away.

"It was terrifying and apocalyptic," Hoag said. "People were yelling and screaming. I ran as fast as I could, mostly backwards because I was filming."

Nearly 20 people were briefly swept away in the incident and eight people were taken to the hospital, Ventura officials said.

High water and dangerous rip currents will churn along some of California's beaches through the weekend as much of the

West coast – spanning from the US-Mexico border to southern Oregon – is under coastal flood and high-surf alerts, the National Weather Service said.



Brian van der Brug/Los Angeles Times/Getty Images

Pierpont, California, neighbors help shovel debris on Bath Lane to help water drain after a seawall and sand berm were breached by high surf on December 28.

The dangerous conditions pose an “exceptional risk” of ocean drowning and damage to structures like piers and jetties, the National Weather Service said.

The dangerous wave risk will lessen on Saturday for Northern California, but continue in southern Oregon and rival Thursday’s impact in Southern California. The Ventura County coast, along with Hermosa, Manhattan and Palos Verdes beaches face the most extreme surf and are at risk for significant coastal flooding.



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One of the storms helping to drive the waves will also bring rain and wind to California through Saturday. High wind alerts are in effect for California’s central coast and the Bay Area on Friday as wind gusts of up to 50 mph are expected. These strong wind gusts will churn up waters even further.

The spectacular waters have enthralled some surfers and onlookers, but weather officials are cautioning that the waves and strong rip tides can be perilous for those nearby.

"Large breaking waves can cause injury, wash people off beaches and rocks, and capsize small boats near shore," the National Weather Service warned.

Two beachgoers pulled a struggling lifeguard to safety Thursday after the same lifeguard rescued a person near the Ventura pier, Ventura County firefighter Andy VanSciver told CNN.

At least one fisherman fell overboard in a harbor off Oxnard Thursday and later came ashore uninjured, the Ventura County Fire Department said.

The conditions caused some road closures and evacuations in coastal California communities Thursday and prompted the rescue of five campers along the San Luis Obispo coast.

Crews in Ventura worked through the night to reinforce a mile-long sand barrier that was damaged by powerful waters on Thursday, the local fire department said. Standing about 7 feet tall, the raised wall helps protect beachside communities.

Hoping to discourage spectators, local officials closed a main access point to Ventura Pier, which saw a swell of about 20 feet on Thursday. Some coastal streets in the area have also been closed as a precaution.

In central California's Santa Cruz, the sheriff's office issued an evacuation warning for some areas on Thursday, which included areas of Rio Del Mar, where seawater filled beachside roadways and pushed against some homes, CNN affiliate KION reported. The warnings were lifted later in the day.





Nic Coury/AP

Storm debris fills the Rio Del Mar neighborhood of Aptos in Santa Cruz County.

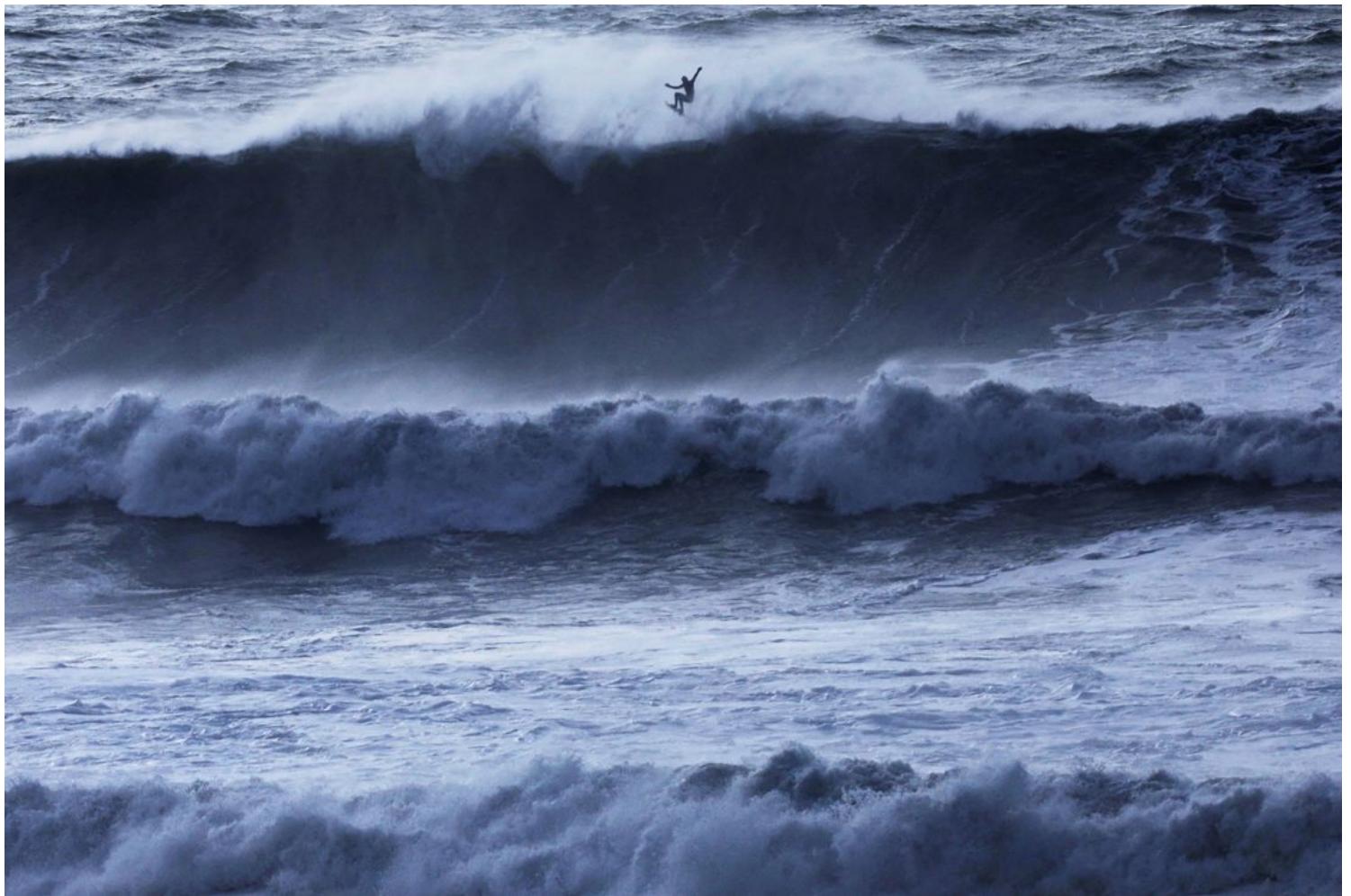
Massive waves attract surfers to Mavericks

Despite safety warnings, the massive waves are a welcome sight to surfers hungry to tackle the legendary swells at Mavericks Beach, about 25 miles south of San Francisco.

Pro surfers and spectators flocked to the beach on Thursday for a competition at the site known for having some of the biggest waves in the world, CNN affiliate KGO reported.

Local resident Ion Banner told the affiliate that surfers from Brazil, Tahiti and Hawaii were out in the water. "It's pretty gnarly, it's super big," he said.

"The waves looked absolutely massive and it was everything that we expected," said Miguel Blanco, who told KGO he flew in from Portugal to surf the waves. "It was really big, I'd say 40-60 foot waves."



Nathan Frandino/Reuters

A surfer catches some air off a wave at Mavericks Beach near Half Moon Bay, California, on December 28.

A surfer catches some air on a wave at Mavericks Beach near Half Moon Bay, California, on December 20.

Mavericks' jaw-dropping waves – caused by unique underwater rock formations – reach their biggest heights in the winter, when big wave surfers from all over the world make pilgrimages to face the swells.

The legendary waves and the surfers who brave them have been the subject of several films and documentaries, including the 2012 biopic "Chasing Mavericks" about American surfer Jay Moriarity's journey to surf Mavericks as a teen.

On Thursday, the conditions were prime for surfers like Blanco.

"If it's your turn, you just gotta go," Blanco said. "When you see a big wave, you're kinda scared but at the same time you're feeling like you should go and you just go and enjoy the ride."

CNN's David Williams, Sharif Paget and Cheri Mossburg contributed to this report.

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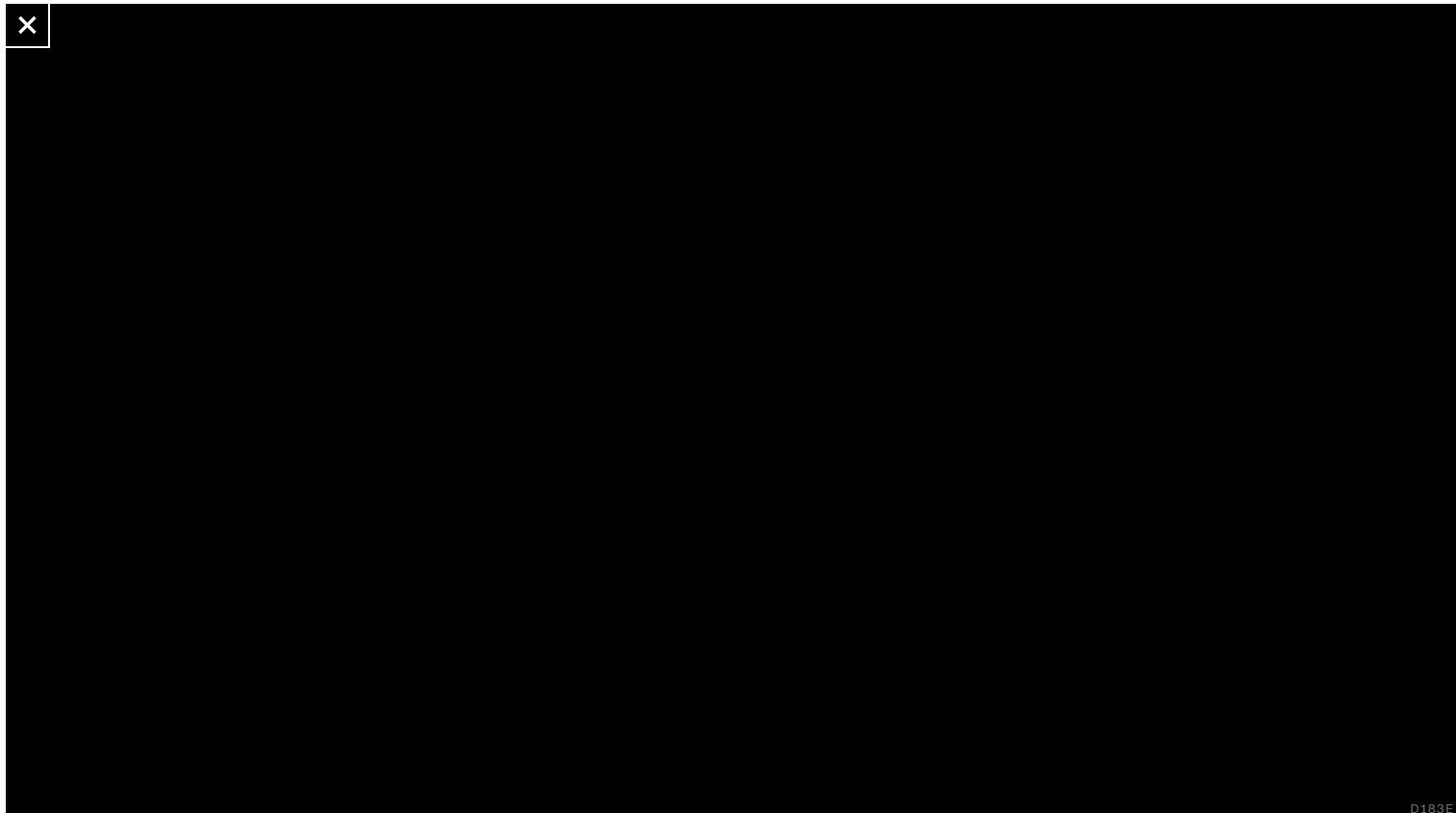
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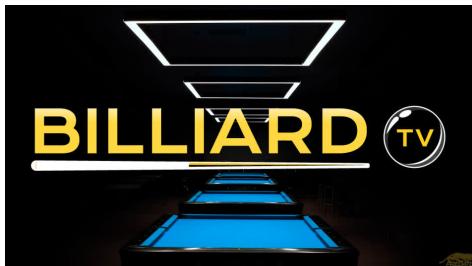
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