Pacific swells pound California coast

LEVEL B2


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I. WARM-UP

1. Have you ever seen very big waves? Where and when?
2. What dangers can storms cause in coastal towns?
3. How should cities prepare for extreme weather?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

coastal
near or along the sea and its shoreline

swell
a long, rolling rise of the sea caused by wind or storms

offshore
out at sea, away from the land

buoy
a floating marker or device used for measurements or warnings

pier
a platform built out over the water for walking, boats or fishing

record-breaking
bigger, faster or higher than any previous measured result

snowfall
the amount of snow that falls during a period

outage
a period when a service, such as electricity, is unavailable

III. READING

California issued multiple coastal hazard warnings as the biggest waves in years hit the state. Beaches and piers were closed as powerful Pacific swells and large breakers crashed into the shoreline. Offshore National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration buoys recorded wave heights of more than 30ft (9 metres).

The Monterey, California, buoy measured 34.1ft, which would be the highest reading in 30 years. Warnings continued for several days. Forecasters expected widespread waves of 10–18ft, with local sets of 18–22ft at San Luis Obispo county beaches and Santa Barbara county central coast beaches.

The same Pacific storm systems brought heavy rain, mountain snowfall and strong winds across the western US. San Francisco saw record-breaking rainfall, and about 32,000 customers suffered power outages in Sacramento.

Forecasters expected more than 100mm (4in) of rain in southern Oregon and northern California, with further snowfall around Donner Pass in the northern Sierra Nevada.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "California's coastal communities on alert...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What actions were taken on California's coast when the big waves arrived?
2. Which buoy measured 34.1ft, and why was that notable?
3. How high were the waves expected to be, and where were the largest sets?
4. Which city had record-breaking rain, and what happened in Sacramento?
5. What further weather was expected, and in which places?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should beaches close during extreme waves? Why or why not?
2. How can coastal towns warn visitors quickly during storms?
3. What items would you put in a home storm kit? Why those?
4. Are extreme weather events becoming more common where you live?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Relative clauses (non-defining)

Use commas to add extra, non-essential information about a noun. In non-defining clauses use which/who/where (not that).

"The Monterey buoy measured 34.1ft, **which would be the highest in 30 years**.*"*

"Storm systems, **which also brought snow and wind**, *hit the western US."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. California issued warnings, (that / which) lasted for days. _____
2. Forecasters, (who / that) track storms, expected heavy rain. _____
3. Huge waves hit the coast, (that / where) beaches were closed. _____
4. The buoys, (which / that) float offshore, recorded huge waves. _____
5. Lifeguards, (that / who) watch the shore, warn of big swells. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension, 10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check units and terms learners may not know: swell, buoy, pier, outage, feet/inches and millimetres.
- Run a skim–scan reading: first ask for the main idea, then have students find key figures (34.1ft, 10–18ft, 18–22ft, 100mm, 32,000). Pair-check before whole-class feedback.
- For discussion, use small groups and assign roles (lifeguard, local official, tourist) to focus on practical safety decisions; move to plenary if time allows.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Start with a quick show of hands, then pair students with different views to exchange reasons.
2. Elicit concrete ideas (apps, sirens, beach flags) and have groups design a 2-step alert plan.
3. Set a 6–8 item limit and ask students to justify each choice with the risk it solves.
4. If answers are brief, ask for one local example and one from the article to compare.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 70–90 word public safety notice for a beach during large swells.

Presentation: In small groups, create a 1-minute briefing on how your town would prepare for 18–22ft waves.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Relative clauses (non-defining)

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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These answers are for teachers only. Please do not share this page with students.


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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What actions were taken on California's coast when the big waves arrived?
   Authorities issued coastal hazard warnings and closed beaches and piers.
2. Which buoy measured 34.1ft, and why was that notable?
   The Monterey buoy; it would be the highest reading in 30 years.
3. How high were the waves expected to be, and where were the largest sets?
   Generally 10–18ft, with 18–22ft sets at San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara beaches.
4. Which city had record-breaking rain, and what happened in Sacramento?
   San Francisco had record rain; about 32,000 customers lost power in Sacramento.
5. What further weather was expected, and in which places?
   Over 100mm of rain in southern Oregon and northern California, plus more snowfall at Donner Pass.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use commas to add extra, non-essential information about a noun. In non-defining clauses use which/who/where (not that). (Examples constructed.)

> *"The Monterey buoy measured 34.1ft,* **which would be the highest in 30 years**.*"*
>
> *"Storm systems,* **which also brought snow and wind**, *hit the western US."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. California issued warnings, (that / which) lasted for days. **which**
2. Forecasters, (who / that) track storms, expected heavy rain. **who**
3. Huge waves hit the coast, (that / where) beaches were closed. **where**
4. The buoys, (which / that) float offshore, recorded huge waves. **which**
5. Lifeguards, (that / who) watch the shore, warn of big swells. **who**