



January 6, 2025

Headlining This Week's Brief

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Top Stories

Southern California Facing a Severe Wind and Fire Weather Event

An upcoming Santa Ana wind event has the potential to be one of the most severe that Southern California has experienced in several years. The event is expected to develop on Tuesday, peak on Wednesday, and continue into Thursday, with moderate offshore winds potentially persisting into Sunday. The strongest winds will impact Ventura and Los Angeles counties, particularly in valleys, foothills, and mountain areas.

There is a high likelihood of strong and damaging winds in typically less wind-prone areas such as the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys, the LA County coast (including the Hollywood Hills, Beverly Hills, Sepulveda Pass, Palos Verdes, and Catalina Island), during the peak event Tuesday evening into Wednesday. Trees, branches, and power lines are likely to be downed.

The strong offshore winds will [significantly elevate fire danger](#), creating conditions that could lead to extreme wildfire behavior. The National Weather Service has advised residents near foothills and mountains to review their fire evacuation plans, with most urged to be in the "Set" stage of readiness in case evacuation orders are issued.

Since November, there have been three notable Santa Ana wind events: November 5 –6, November 13–15, and December 9–11. The early November event indirectly sparked two significant wildfires in Ventura and Los Angeles counties: the [Mountain Fire](#) and the [Broad Fire](#). The Mountain Fire burned over 19,000 acres, damaged numerous buildings, and caused several injuries. The Broad Fire also led to localized evacuations. The early December Santa Ana wind episode fueled the [Franklin Fire](#), which destroyed

properties in Malibu and threatened [Pepperdine University](#).

Strike by U.S. East and Gulf Coast Dockworkers May Resume Mid-January

Dockworkers at every major port along the East and Gulf coasts of the United States may go back on strike beginning January 16 if an impasse between the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and the United States Maritime Alliance (USMX) persists. The ILA had gone on strike for [three days](#) in October 2024 before suspending the industrial action until mid-January after reaching a tentative deal that included wage increases of 62%. However, the larger issue of the use of automation remains unresolved and is now the key barrier to a final agreement between the ILA and USMX.

The impact of a walkout would be felt across industries, with estimates [ranging](#) from between \$1 billion and \$5 billion a day in lost activity. Those that rely on just-in-time shipping, like automotive and perishables, are likely to be most affected. Combined, East and Gulf Coast ports [handle](#) over 40% of all U.S. imports and include [six of the 10](#) busiest ports in the country, handling cargo from Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Freight rates could spike as backlogs increase, and some shippers have [implemented](#) additional fees and surcharges to offset the potential financial impact of a strike. A strike of more than a few weeks would disrupt industries that rely on imported raw materials and likely increase consumer costs. Disruptions could be further compounded by any potential tariffs President-elect Donald Trump puts in place upon assuming office on January 20.

More information on anticipated impacts is available in AlertMedia's [situation report](#).

Authorities to Increase Security at Prominent Events Following Attacks in New Orleans, Las Vegas

Following the New Year's Day vehicle ramming attack in [New Orleans](#) that killed 14 and the detonation of [explosives](#) inside a Tesla Cybertruck outside of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas, officials are [warning](#) organizers of other prominent events to increase security and reassess their preparations. The FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center sent a [security bulletin](#) to law enforcement partners warning of possible copycat attacks in the days ahead. The risk is amplified by several high-profile events on the calendar, including the certification of electoral college votes today in Washington, D.C., the presidential inauguration on January 20, the scheduled sentencing of President-elect Donald Trump in New York City on Friday, January 10, and the Super Bowl and Mardi Gras in New Orleans on February 9 and March 4, respectively. Authorities have upped security around Trump properties in New York and Chicago, and several private companies have also reportedly increased their security posture.

Climate and Natural Hazards

- **Texas Winter Storm Likely:** A moderate to high chance of winter storm watches, and advisories is expected across the [Dallas-Fort Worth \(DFW\)](#) area, while additional winter weather advisories could be issued as far south as the Central Texas Hill Country, including parts of the Austin metro. A few inches of snow are possible within DFW, enough to cause severe disruptions on Thursday. Meanwhile, freezing rain and ice could be the more dominant concerns near Central Texas and Austin. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has issued a [Weather Watch](#) for January 6-10, anticipating below-normal temperatures and increased energy demand but no grid disruptions.
- **Major Winter Storm Slams Central, Eastern U.S.:** [Major winter storm conditions](#) have affected over 60 million people across 30 states, with seven states declaring emergencies due to blizzards, freezing rain, and tornado threats. Kansas and Missouri were among the hardest hit, recording nearly a foot of snow and whiteout conditions. Roughly 350,000 customers were without power as of early Monday. Most alerts have been able to expire across Kansas and Missouri. Through the rest of the day, an additional four-plus inches of snowfall is forecast for parts of Maryland, D.C., extreme southern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, with [Winter Storm Warnings](#) remaining in effect. Over 700 flights have been canceled across Reagan National (DCA), Baltimore/Washington International (BWI), and Washington Dulles International (IAD) airports.
- **Massive Snowstorm Impacting Norway and Sweden:** Orange Level Snow Warnings are in effect for Oslo, with the [Norwegian Meteorological Institute](#) calling for 12-16 inches, locally 20, of accumulation Monday through early Tuesday morning. Norway's largest grid company increased its [preparedness](#) ahead of the storm, but such snow and high winds will result in inevitable disruptions.
- **Eastern South Africa Hit by Severe Thunderstorms:** As of early Monday, much of the region was under Orange Level [Disruptive Rainfall Warnings](#), with [satellite animations](#) confirming the presence of numerous showers and thunderstorms. Forecast models indicated the potential for localized 24-hour rain totals greater than three to five inches between Durban, Richards Bay, and Newcastle, more than enough to cause scattered flash flooding, some locally major. The regional weather pattern is likely to remain active through at least Saturday, with several more rounds of rain and flooding possible.

Worldwide

- **Political Instability in Europe Shapes This Year's Election Outlook:** While 2025 won't see the record number of elections seen in 2024, recent government collapses in Europe indicate a politically turbulent year is ahead. Incumbent parties across the globe [fared poorly in 2024](#), and recent developments in [Canada](#), [Germany](#), and [France](#) signal that voters may continue to reject the status quo. Austria just held a parliamentary election in September but is facing political uncertainty after [coalition talks collapsed](#), meaning that a snap election is now a possibility. Outside Europe, notable scheduled elections this year include, in chronological order, Ecuador, Australia, Gabon, Bolivia, Canada, and Chile.
- **Maduro, Opposition Candidate Both Plan to Assume Venezuelan Presidency:** Venezuela's incumbent President Nicolás Maduro and opposition candidate Edmundo González—currently on a tour of Latin American countries after ending his exile in Spain—have both said that they plan to assume the presidency on January 10 as each continues to claim victory in last July's election. The vote was met with allegations of fraud and opposition protests, triggering a government crackdown that [resulted](#) in over two dozen deaths, hundreds of injuries, and approximately 2,400 detainments. While those protests have largely subsided, opposition leader María Corina Machado has called for mass demonstrations on January 9, and Maduro is planning to hold nationwide celebrations around the inauguration. For a more in-depth look ahead of January 10, see AlertMedia's [situation report](#).
- **Suspended President Yoon Resists Arrest Attempt:** An attempt by the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) to arrest suspended South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol [failed](#) on Thursday after a six-hour standoff with pro-Yoon supporters and security staff outside the presidential residence, causing them to back down. The arrest warrant was issued after Yoon ignored repeated summonses for questioning over his short-lived imposition of martial law in early December. The warrant expired at midnight today, [prompting](#) the CIO to ask for an extension and setting the stage for another arrest attempt. Meanwhile, large rallies by supporters and opponents of Yoon are expected to continue over the coming weeks, with Yoon's impeachment trial [formally](#) set to begin on January 14. Amid South Korea's protracted political crisis, North Korea [launched](#) a suspected hypersonic missile into the East Sea earlier today.
- **Gang Violence Triggers State of Emergency in Trinidad and Tobago:** Last Monday, Trinidad and Tobago declared a country-wide [state of emergency](#) following a weekend that saw several murders, including five men believed to be targeted in reprisal shootings. No curfew will be implemented alongside the state of emergency. Still, an increased security presence is expected,

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and law enforcement will be able to conduct searches, detain people for questioning for 48 hours, and conduct arrests without a warrant. Trinidad and Tobago [recorded](#) at least 623 murders last year, up from 577 in [2023](#). The local U.S. Embassy issued a [security alert](#), and the State Department maintains a Level 3 travel advisory for the country.

- **U.S. Federal Government to Shut Down for Day of Mourning:** Much of the U.S. federal government, with the exception of that necessary for “national security, defense, or other public need,” will [close](#) on Thursday, January 9, for a day of mourning for deceased former President Jimmy Carter. The United States Postal Service will suspend operations, with the exception of some limited package delivery services, and U.S. embassies and consulates will be closed. Carter’s official state funeral will be held Thursday at the Washington National Cathedral before his remains travel to Plains, GA. A security assessment obtained by [ABC News](#) states that the funeral is an attractive target “for violent extremists to attack.” However, officials are not aware of any specific threats at this time.

Cyber and Regulatory

- **U.S. Treasury Department Hacked Via Third-Party Vendor:** Chinese state-sponsored actors [breached](#) the U.S. Treasury Department using an access key stolen from third-party vendor BeyondTrust on December 8, 2024. The stolen key, used to provide remote product support, allowed the hackers to access unclassified documents and user workstations and override the service’s security. BeyondTrust is working with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) and the FBI to investigate the breach. In related news, officials [confirmed](#) that a ninth U.S. telecommunications firm was breached as part of the Chinese-linked Salt Typhoon hack.
- **EPA Allows California to Ban Sale of New Gas-Only Cars by 2035:** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [granted a waiver](#) to California and eleven other states that allow them to mandate that all new cars sold by 2035 must be zero-emission vehicles. Gas-only vehicles would still be legal to own, drive, and resell. California’s plan has been in the works since [2020](#) and is part of the state’s efforts to reduce air pollution and combat climate change. While the move aligns with [emissions rules](#) finalized this year by the Biden administration, President-elect Donald Trump has suggested he [abolish](#) California’s program and [roll back support](#) for the electric vehicle industry.
- **U.S. Lawmakers Propose Strict Cybersecurity Requirements for Healthcare Providers:** A bill [introduced](#) cybersecurity protocols and create processes to respond to cyberattacks. Additionally, the bill would require healthcare providers to utilize multifactor authentication and encrypt patient data in case of a breach. The proposal [follows](#) at least 567 cybersecurity

incidents involving the exposure of nearly 170 million people's healthcare information in 2024. The bipartisan bill is under a 60-day public comment period where healthcare providers can provide feedback.

- **Enforcement of U.S. Corporate Transparency Act Suspended Following Legal Back-and-Forth:** The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit [vacated](#) a panel's decision to revive the enforceability of the Corporate Transparency Act (CTA), once again putting the legislation on hold. The latest move by the Fifth Circuit means that small businesses do not currently have to file Beneficial Ownership Information Reports (BOIRs) with the Financial Crime Enforcement Network (FinCEN), although they may do so [voluntarily](#). The Fifth Circuit has set an oral argument date of March 25, suggesting that the [injunction](#) will stay in effect through at least that date, although at least three other U.S. Courts of Appeals have pending appeals to the law. The CTA was put in place to combat money laundering and [requires](#) owners of an estimated 32.6 million small businesses to register with FinCEN or face fines of up to \$10,000.
- **Official Websites and Airports Targeted in Cyberattacks:** Threat actors [targeted](#) several of Italy's official websites, including two airports in Milan, in a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack on December 28. Authorities were able to mitigate the attack within a few hours, avoiding flight disruptions. Two days earlier, twenty-four of Japan Airlines' domestic flights were [delayed](#) following a cyberattack. The airlines' ticket sales were suspended in response to the attack, though normal operations resumed a few hours later.

Infrastructure and Supply Chain

- **Japanese Carmakers Announce Merger Talks, China's BYD Faces Allegations of Human Trafficking at Plant in Brazil:** Japanese carmakers Honda, Nissan, and Mitsubishi [announced](#) that they are in talks over a possible merger, which, if formed, would be the third-largest carmaker by sales. The discussions come as the companies scramble to catch up to global electric vehicle (EV) demand amid heightened [competition](#) from Chinese companies. Meanwhile, Chinese EV car producer BYD is facing [allegations](#) of human trafficking from workers at one of its plants in Brazil—the company's biggest foreign market. Last month, Brazilian authorities [uncovered](#) "slavery-like" working conditions at a construction site at a factory owned by BYD, prompting the government to [halt](#) temporary visas for BYD workers.
- **Ukraine Officially Cuts Off Russian Gas Transit to Europe:** Ukraine has officially [halted](#) Russian natural gas transit to Europe through its territory. While gas prices within the European Union are unlikely to be significantly impacted, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who has [remained](#) friendly with Russian President Vladimir Putin, [called](#) the move "sabotage," [warning](#) of "drastic" consequences while contemplating potential retaliatory measures, including cutting

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electricity to Ukraine and withdrawing support for 130,000 Ukrainian refugees. In Moldova, Prime Minister Dorin Recean [described](#) a “security crisis” after the cutoff, which [shut down](#) industries in its breakaway territory Transdniestria, leaving residents without hot water or heating.

- **Restrictions, Investigations Continue Into South Korea Plane Crash:** In the wake of the Jeju Air plane crash at Muan International Airport in South Korea, which claimed 179 lives, new Acting President Choi Sang-mok [ordered](#) nationwide emergency inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by South Korean airlines through [January 10](#). Muan International Airport remains [closed](#) as investigations continue. Authorities [raided](#) Jeju Air offices and placed travel bans on key airline officials, citing suspicions of “causing deaths by negligence.” The government had declared a seven-day mourning period, which ended on January 4.
- **New York Launches Congestion Pricing Program:** Yesterday, New York City officially launched its [congestion pricing program](#) after a series of legal battles. The new program imposes toll fees starting at \$9 on vehicles entering Manhattan below 60th St during peak hours. The initiative, which aims to reduce traffic congestion and generate funds for public transit, has received pushback, as some say it unfairly impacts commuters. Last month, Governor Kathy Hochul [signed](#) the Climate Change Superfund Act, requiring companies, particularly from the oil and gas industry, found responsible for carbon emissions buildup to pay \$3 billion for 25 years for infrastructure projects to boost climate resiliency.
- **Biden Blocks Nippon Steel Acquisition of U.S. Steel:** Last Friday, in a long-awaited move, President Joe Biden [blocked](#) Nippon Steel’s \$14.9 billion acquisition of U.S. Steel, citing national security concerns. Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel criticized the move as a violation of due process and indicated plans to pursue legal action. The United Steelworkers union supported the decision, while the Japanese government expressed disappointment. U.S. Steel is the third-largest steelmaker in the U.S. and the 24th-largest worldwide; however, the company has reported failing profits amid a faltering demand for steel in recent years.

Health

- **China Facing Significant Viral Activity, Including From Human Metapneumovirus:** Chinese officials are [urging calm](#) and asserting that travel to the country is safe amid reports that respiratory illness activity was stressing hospitals. The nation has recorded an uptick in viral cases, including from [human metapneumovirus](#) (HMPV). Still, [authorities say](#) the present situation is in line with winter season transmission and claim that figures are lower this year compared to last. Nevertheless, [regional governments](#) are on alert for potential impacts of the virus spread, and Nigerian media [reports](#) that the government there is activating surveillance

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measures for travelers coming from China. HMPV has been around for years, and experts [report](#) that the case hike in China is likely due in part to better tech identifying the virus.

- **Winter Also Brings Continued Flu and Other Respiratory Virus Spread to U.S., Europe:** In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [says](#) viral respiratory illnesses are causing people to seek healthcare at high levels that continue to increase nationally, with emergency department visits for flu and RSV at “very high” rates as of early January. Influenza and RSV transmission is also [on the rise](#) in Europe. Officials in the U.K. [reported](#) Friday that flu activity increased across most indicators and was circulating at high levels, leading to an increase in hospitalizations. Similarly, France, Spain, Hungary, and Romania are all [reportedly](#) seeing rising flu cases and hospital admissions.
- **Norovirus Spread Adds to Respiratory Woes:** The U.S. is also facing a [significant uptick](#) in norovirus cases driven by the winter season and [potentially a new strain](#). In the week of December 5 (the most recent data available), state health departments reported 91 outbreaks to the CDC. That figure [exceeds](#) the previous week’s total of 69, more than double the maximum average (41) during the same week between 2021-2024, and is also higher than pre-pandemic levels for the timeframe. The U.K. has also been dealing with increased norovirus activity. Outbreaks [recorded this season](#) are well above the five- season average. In the two weeks to December 8, norovirus reports almost double the five-season average for the same two-week period.
- **U.S. Announces \$308 Million Investment in Bird Flu Preparedness:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has [announced](#) a \$306 million investment to bolster the nation’s H5N1 Avian Flu response. Funding includes \$183 million for state and local readiness programs, \$111 million for monitoring efforts, and \$11 million for research into medical countermeasures. The news comes as concerns continue to grow about the virus’s [potential to mutate](#) into a form more capable of spreading in humans. The [number of human cases](#) in the U.S. remains at 66, and officials still assess the risk to the general public as low; however, the country [recorded](#) its first severe case in December, and H5N1 continues to spread in [birds](#) and [cattle](#).
- **Kenya Added to CDC Mpox Travel Health Notice:** Earlier today, the U.S. Embassy in Kenya issued a [Health Alert](#) noting that the CDC had added Kenya to a [Level 2 Travel Health Notice](#) for the mpox outbreak spreading in Central and Eastern Africa. The country continues to report cases of the clade 1b mpox strain that helped prompt the World Health Organization (WHO) to [declare](#) a public health emergency of international concern last year. The CDC notice does not advise against travel to Kenya but urges enhanced precautions. Mpox transmission [remains](#)

[active](#) across Africa, particularly in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), the epicenter of the outbreak.

Demonstrations and Industrial Action

- **AfD Party Conference Sparks Mass Mobilization in Saxony State:** German police [expect](#) 10,000 people to descend into Riesa, a small town in eastern Germany, to protest the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party's federal conference this weekend. The conference comes ahead of early elections on February 23, prompted by the [collapse](#) of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government. Polling gains by the AfD have sparked demonstration activity against it, with critics pointing to policies that would strictly limit immigration. Opponents of AfD, organizing under the campaign slogan "Widersetzen" (Resist), have publicly announced two demonstrations against the conference on Saturday morning, with additional demonstration activity expected throughout the weekend.
- **Demonstrations Against Constitutional Amendments Draw Large Crowds in Taiwan:** Taiwan will see continued demonstrations against proposed legislative amendments by the Kuomintang Party, with a gathering planned in Taichung on Wednesday, January 8, and further actions expected in Hsinchu and Miaoli on January 15. Taiwan has experienced significant demonstrations [opposing](#) legislative amendments introduced by opposition parties that would expand the legislature's oversight powers. The resulting protest activity, notably the "Bluebird Movement," has drawn tens of thousands of participants. Approximately 7,000 people gathered in Taipei in late December, and [clashes](#) with police were reported.
- **Self-Exiled Opposition Candidate to Return to Mozambique This Week:** Venâncio Mondlane, the Mozambican opposition candidate who has organized weeks of election-related demonstrations via social media after fleeing the country in late October, [plans](#) to return this Thursday, January 9. Mondlane called for a pause in demonstration activity last week despite previous plans to announce a new phase of protests. Demonstrations surged in late December after the country's Constitutional Council [confirmed](#) that Frelimo, the ruling party, won the October election. At least 278 people have [died](#) since demonstrations broke out. Mondlane disputes the results of the vote and has previously announced that he intends to be inaugurated instead of Frelimo's Daniel Chapo.
- **Medical Professionals in U.S., Türkiye Mark Start of New Year With Strike Notices:** In what could be Oregon's largest healthcare strike in history, approximately 5,000 nurses and doctors at eight Providence Health & Services across Oregon **intend to strike** beginning Friday, January 10. Physicians in New York City also have a notice on file and plan to [strike](#) beginning next Monday, January 13, if a new contract is not reached. In Hawaii, approximately 100 nurses are set to [strike](#)

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for three days beginning January 14 at Kauai's Wilcox Medical Center, one of three hospitals on the island. Across the globe in Türkiye, healthcare workers, including family doctors and [dentists](#), are [holding](#) a nationwide work stoppage through Friday.

- **Demonstrations Against Bolivia's Government to Restart This Week:** Organizations supportive of former President Evo Morales intend to [restart demonstrations](#) against the Arce government on January 10. To kick off mobilizations, the groups are planning a march to La Paz from the town of Patacamaya. A similar march on the capital in September 2024 [resulted](#) in violent clashes. Unions in El Alto have also [called](#) for nationwide demonstrations against the government on January 13 over economic issues. They will hold a "[large march](#)" from El Alto's Coliseo Multifuncional to Plaza Murillo in La Paz on January 14.

Upcoming Events

- January 6: Counting and Certification of Electoral Votes (United States)
- January 7: Orthodox Christmas (Global)
- January 7: Presidential Inauguration (Ghana)
- January 9: State Funeral for Former President Jimmy Carter (United States)
- January 9: Feast of the Black Nazarene (Manila, Philippines)
- January 9: Martyr's Day (Panama)
- January 10: Criminal Sentencing for President-elect Donald Trump (United States)
- January 10: Presidential Inauguration (Venezuela)