

Weather Challenges Keep Coming

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Even though we have had some time to let the March 2019 blizzard and flood sink in, it is still in the front of the minds of many Nebraskans. I constantly think back to the series of events that led up to that event and think “Could the March 2019 flood happen again?” or “Will our weather ever give us a break?”

The flooding event from the Bomb Cyclone on March 13–14 seemingly “snuck” up on us. Even though there were warnings a few days in advance of this incredibly powerful mid-latitude cyclone, I don’t think anyone realized what types of risks were out there.

As you recall, mid-January through early March of 2019 was one of the coldest and wettest periods in recent record for much of Nebraska. Parts of eastern Nebraska received over 20–30 inches above-normal snowfall and the average temperature in the state was



Photo courtesy of Jeff Berggren

Cornstalks and hay bales displaced by ice-covered flood waters on March 14 near Columbus.

10–15°F below normal for the 60-day period. The extremely cold temperatures froze the soil down a few feet and also created thick ice on top of lakes and rivers.

The ice proved to be the most detrimental factor in the entire March 13–14 event. The frozen ground prevented any moisture from infiltrating into the soil creating a near 100% runoff rate, exacerbated in some areas by steep terrain. Even saturated soils will allow some percolation through the profile, but the ice-packed soil just “sped up” the runoff at rates that are hard to quantify. The ice-covered lakes and rivers prevented this water from evacuating quickly

and added to the destruction typically seen by water alone.

The timing of this event could not have been much worse for many livestock producers. The cold and wet winter dwindled feed supplies and multiplied the energy needed by livestock just to maintain their condition. The 4–6 weeks prior to the “bomb cyclone” event left the livestock producers in tough shape and then this storm came, which was during calving season, and took out large portions of cow-calf herds. If the animals survived, the next challenge was dealing with mud, sickness and very little grass growth in the pasture. Spring-like conditions couldn’t come fast enough, and I

am not sure they ever really did.

Could It Happen Again?

This type of event is certainly possible to happen again, although, it is hard to get all of those conditions to align. A big component was the extended cold and we have been on a cooling trend in the month of February the past 30 years, even though our long-term trend is on a strong warming trend. Our late-winter pattern is proving to be “persistent,” whether it is warm or cold, and lately it has been cold. This persistence creates extreme conditions, and extreme cold and wet is definitely one of them.

The transition time from the extreme cold, snow and ice to spring-like weather systems is a key element to an event like this. We need time for snow and ice to melt and run off before we get heavy precipitation events. I do know I will be paying closer attention to ice and snow cover as we move into spring in the future.

El Niño Expected Through Summer

The outlook for the summer does not really show a “break” from the dominant pattern from the last nine months, as cool and wet conditions still have the highest odds for occurrence
see WEATHER on page 5

Block Play Encourages Children’s Development in Multiple Areas

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I would guess many families with young children have at least one set of blocks in their home. One of my oldest daughter’s first toys was a bag of plain wooden blocks, a gift from her uncle. We would spend lots of time stacking them up and knocking them down! Some of our other favorite blocks include: Fisher Price peek-a-boo blocks, soft activity blocks and the ever-popular Lego Duplos — which are considered an interlocking block or a manipulative. Have you ever considered how important block play is for child development?

What Is a Block?

Merriam-Webster defines a block as a lightweight, usually cubical, and solid wooden or plastic building toy, which is usually provided as a set.

Blocks Are Brain Builders

Block play supports and encourages children’s development in multiple areas.

Math: counting, numbers, quantity, measurement (length, height and weight), symmetry, patterns, estimation, addition, subtraction, geometry, size, spatial relations and more!

Science: gravity, weight, balance, cause and effect, designing, perseverance and problem solving, etc.

Language and Literacy: storytelling about what they

made or are making, differentiate different shapes and sizes and describing properties.

Physical Skills: large motor and muscle coordination (building uses arms, legs and core), small muscle development with smaller blocks (using fingers and hands), as well as hand-eye coordination.

Self-Regulation and Social Skills: problem solving, persistence, flexibility, cooperation skills, respect for others, sharing, independence and communication skills.

Which Blocks Are Best for My Child?

Consider the age and abilities of the child when purchasing or creating homemade blocks.

Infants 0–24 months are at the stage of discovery and stacking. Look for bigger, lighter blocks that are easy to clean. This age of child will put everything in their mouth, and will need something they can easily carry around. Stacking and lining up blocks are actions you will see.

Children 2–3 years of age begin complex stacking. Adults will begin to notice there are both vertical and horizontal stacks created to develop towers.

Children 3–4 years of age start creating foundations of buildings (like the floor plan at the zoo, or a house with rooms). These children will name their project “grandma’s house” or “parking garage.” This age of children also create bridges or arches and 4–5 year old children will begin to create complex buildings, adding in ramps and doors.

Children 5 and older begin to create block structures they will use for pretend play. We know that play is important, however research done by the Gesell Institute in Connecticut has found that pretend play matters a lot in order to be a successful grown up in our world. This type of play provides a safe space for children to practice using the types of mental skills that help them to self-regulate.

How Can I Make Homemade Blocks?

Put on your detective hat and search for old items you could repurpose into blocks. Milk cartons, old phone books, pudding or jello boxes, tissue boxes, and small or large cardboard shipping boxes. Wrap these items in colored duct tape to create lasting blocks. It can be fun to wrap some blocks in tin foil or colored paper for a different texture and color. Another suggestion to increase the depth of play would be to tape pictures of your child(ren), their friends or pictures of familiar landmarks (state capitol, their school, the zoo, your house or the football stadium).

What Can I Do to Support My Child’s Block Play?

Asking open-ended questions is a valuable way to encourage deeper engagement during block play. Asking questions also helps children analyze and evaluate their work. Some possible questions to ask children during block play are:

- How is your building different from your friends?
- Have you decided how to build the bridge?
- What is one way you could keep your tower from falling over?

- Which blocks make the most interesting buildings?
- What part of the castle was the most difficult part to build?

Peer reviewed by Tasha Wulf, Extension Educator, West Central Research and Extension Center.

Extension Offers “Block Party” for Childcare Programs

“Block Party” is a program developed by the University of Wisconsin Extension and adapted for Purdue Extension. Nebraska Extension is now offering Block Party as a statewide program to bring parents, early childhood educators and children together to engage in block play. Childcare programs may request Extension present either of the following workshops by contacting your local Extension office and asking for the Learning Child Educator. There is a nominal fee. In Lancaster County, call 402-441-7180 and ask for Jaci Foged — the programs can be offered at the childcare facility or Lancaster Extension Education Center.

- Two-hour Block Party professional development workshop for early childhood teachers — By taking time to play with a variety of blocks, teachers will develop a better understanding of the multitude of ways children learn by playing with blocks, and how to best support block play in their classrooms.
- Two-hour Block Party for childcare programs to offer their families provides a fun and interactive way to engage families. Families will learn how to support their child’s learning and development through block play.

Upcoming Early Childhood Trainings

Nebraska Extension teaches several early childhood development classes for child care providers. Listed are upcoming classes held at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road (unless location otherwise noted). For additional information or to sign up, contact Jaci Foged at jfoged2@unl.edu or 402-441-7180. Some registration forms are at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/family>

Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care (Go NAP SACC) Training for Childcare Providers — Thursdays, Aug. 22, Aug. 29 and Sept. 5. 6:30–8:30 p.m. Must attend all nights. Free. Register by Aug. 16 at <https://go.unl.edu/napsacc>.