

CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN

Friday, November 1, 1929

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

ANNOUNCEMENT: Every other Friday, old Ob. Server tells us something new about the weather and the weather men. He has inside information. He has talked with the weather-wise men of the U. S. Weather Bureau. He knows what they are doing to help the rest of us take advantage of the best weather and dodge the effects of the worst weather. — All right, Ob Server, what's new now?

Swapping weather talk with the neighbors, I find what is new to some folks is old to others. And what is old to some of us, is fresh as a bright November morning to others. Shipping forecasts are a case in point.

About this time of the year, when I begin to drop casual remarks about the shipping forecasts, some fellow, who is not a shipper, speaks up and wants to know, "What are shipping forecasts?"

Weather Bureau stations have been making shipping forecasts for twenty years or more now. True, they never attracted much attention until the World War and the big move to conserve all foodstuffs. The big shippers and railroads began to make more regular use of them then.

Nowadays, Mr. Montrose W. Hayes of the U. S. Weather Bureau tells me, there is no perishable produce shipped by rail from the big shipping centers except on shippers' forecasts. Mr. Hayes is the new man in charge of the River and Flood Division of the Weather Bureau, but for years he was at the St. Louis station, where among other things, he had much to do with the development of weather forecast service to shippers there.

Shipping forecasts are issued during the winter in all parts of the United States when the temperature is expected to be freezing or lower. These forecasts show the temperatures which may be encountered by freight trains within the next twenty-four hours. They are made to cover the distance an ordinary freight train will travel in twenty-four hours.

They read something like this: "Protect shipments northbound against temperatures of zero to twenty below, eastbound ten to fifteen, south between fifteen to twenty, and west zero to ten below."

The forecasters use the same regular daily weather map, made up from observations taken all over the country, which they use in making the ordinary weather forecasts with which we are all familiar. In making the shipping forecasts, however, shippers are warned against temperatures a little lower than those expected to show on the thermometers at the Weather Bureau stations. That is because freight trains moving along valleys and standing in exposed open country, are apt to meet colder air than that at the regular Weather stations.

Every thing we eat of a perishable nature which moves in winter is protected by these forecasts, which form one of the most important services of the U. S. Weather Bureau in winter time.

Of course, they are of the biggest benefit and are issued to a greater extent in regions where there is a fluctuation in temperature from well above to considerably below freezing.

As shipping by ordinary freight car is cheaper than in insulated or by heated cars, shippers want to know when they can ship by ordinary freight cars. Railroads, on the other hand, will not accept shipments of perishables for ordinary freight cars if a temperature below a certain limit they have set is forecast.

At the forecasting station ~~average~~, ~~and~~ are often kept busy answering calls for the forecast from shippers and railroads. The short, pithy predictions of temperatures to the north, east, south, and west are soon given. The forecasts are wired out each morning over ordinary commercial lines at the regular rates, and the railroads and shippers pay the toll.

But these forecasts often enable them to make big savings. By preventing heavy and sudden losses, they have a tendency to keep produce prices more even.

It is easy to see the value of such information in the case of apples and oranges and other fruits and vegetables. Also for shipments of mineral waters, and inks, and mucilages. But Mr. Hayes tells me that one of the big uses of these forecasts is in shipping iron ore, and gravel, and sand.

Folks who have never had any experience with such shipments in cold weather might think that sort of queer. Not long ago, however, a company loaded some open cars with sand and gravel when the lowest temperature was 48 degrees. Then they got a shipping forecast of a thirty degree drop. Instead of letting the shipment go ahead, they ordered the cars dumped and waited for warmer weather. The sand and gravel goes in the cars wet. It might freeze solid in the cars and not only tie up the material for several weeks but also tie up the cars all that time. Either that, or the expense of thawing it out by steam.

The same is true in the case of shipments of iron and other ores. So you see, it is not only the perishable produce which is protected by these forecasts. Then there are the coal dealers. Naturally, they want to know when it is going to be cold. Retail coal dealers are often largely guided in placing orders with the mines, and wholesalers and brokers by Weather Bureau forecasts. And, of course, many florists make use of weather information in shipping flowers.

This time of the year, here for the next few weeks, is the time shipping forecasts are most in demand. All winter in most of the big shipping centers, however, there will be thousands of calls for this special forecast service which has been developed by the Weather Bureau. And, of course, the other end of the thermometer is of interest to summer shippers of perishables.

To ship or not ship in refrigerator cars? To ice or not to ice the cars? are very practical money questions with some kinds of produce in the summer. Shippers and railroads often read the answer from these shipping forecasts which now are rated as one of the most valuable of the many valuable services performed

by the United States Weather Bureau

ANNOUNCEMENT: Our Ob. Server will again chat with Station _____'s audience two weeks from today. We have had weather for a long time now. But it is such a changeable subject, the U. S. Weather Bureau men seem to be kept pretty busy keeping ahead of the changes.

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National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

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