UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

CHATS WITH THE WEATHER MAN RELEASE Friday, October 13, 1932

FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY

Reading Time: 10 Minutes

ANNOUNCEMENT: And now we pause for a little chat with the Weather Man. The Weather Man tells us folks along the Gulf Coast are much annoyed by all of those tropical hurricanes they have been having this year. There's talk of really "doing something about it"----Mark Twain's famous wisecrack to the contrary.

--ooOoo--

Yes, folks in the hurricane belt are experiencing a busy season.

The talk there runs all the way from plans to improve the storm warning service by the use of ship patrols to schemes to snuff out those big storms just like you blow out a candle.

If any of those storm-control schemes work, Mother Nature's reputation as a brewer of storms is ruined. She might as well pack up her storm machinery and cart it away to a museum.

For instance, Mr. I.R. Tannehill, of the United States Weather Bureau, was telling me the other day of one man's scheme to stop hurricanes with a big explosion.

That explosion idea is one of the oldest and most common of all the dozen and one schemes for control of storms. Scarcely a hurricane season passes without somebody suggesting it to the Weather Bureau. The idea seems to date back to early days when sailing vessels began to ply the routes to the East and West Indies. As the story goes, these sailing vessels carried cannon to shoot waterspouts. Waterspouts, you know, are those gigantic columns of wind that whirl over the ocean sucking up mist, spray, and water. Some folks say if the early navigators believed they could break up waterspouts with a cannon, why can't we scatter a hurricane with a blast of dynamite.

As you talk with Mr. Tannehill, you learn of all sorts of objections to such a scheme.

Hurricanes are often a hundred miles or more across. They cover thousands of square miles. Just fancy setting off a blast big enough to break up a storm covering the area of a goodsized state. You probably would jolt a lot of folks out of bed and bring bricks from the chimney raining down on the roof.

Besides, what proof have you that an explosion would have any effect on a hurricane, anyhow? I may not be very scientific in comparing a hurricane with a whirlpool. But I think I can use a whirlpool to illustrate Mr. Tannenhill's idea. Let's take a whirlpool caused by water running down the kitchen sink. If you stir up the water over the drain, the whirling stops for a moment. But the forces causing the whirl are still at work. As soon as the disturbance you caused begins to die away, the whirling starts again.

Maybe the same thing is true of hurricanes.

Mr. Tannehill told me of another scheme much like the explosion idea. One man suggested sucking up the hurricane with a big fan of some kind and a funnel.

But the prize scheme of all comes from a woman who suggest heading off the storms before they start by filling in the Caribbean Sea. Mr. Tannehill looked at that big sea of water down there, half the size of the United States, and said a bit dryly, "Fine scheme--- But it would take an awful lot of dirt."

Some of those ideas and theories are a bit impractical, to say the least. But this year's bumper crop of hurricanes has brought forth another type of suggestions a little closer to earth, so to speak. Mr. Tannehill told me of one suggestion in particular. It was a plan --an old plan, by the way-- to improve the storm-warning service.

Folks who live in those storm zones like to have some idea of just when and where those big hurricanes are going to hit. They have their own lives and often much property to look after before the storm breaks. They look to the Weather Bureau for timely warnings.

For instance, farmers have to pen up their livestock, or drive them to higher ground.

Livestock do a rather peculiar thing during big storms. When it is raining cattle, often start walking in the direction the wind is blowing. They keep walking until they run into something that stops them. If they come to a river, or lake, or the ocean, they walk right in and drown. They do about the same thing in a snow storm. They walk with the wind until they come to a fence, or some other obstruction, and lie down--- and perhaps die.

Merchants in towns on low land along the coast have to take steps to protect their goods. They have to move their stock from the basement and first floor up to higher floors to be out of reach of water from a high tide.

Bathers, campers, and fisherman must have advance warning of storms so they won't be caught in rising water and drowned.

Officials in some coastal towns in the hurricane's path must have time to arrange to transport people from the coast to the interior by rail or automobile.

The railroads must move cars of grain and so on from low to high ground.

Owners of homes and office buildings must board up their windows and take building materials, or anything else, from the roof that might blow off into the street and kill somebody.

So, naturally, folks along the coast are much interested in advance notices about those monster storms that come howling up out of the tropics.

In fact, they are so much interested they are petitioning the Weather Bureau to enlarge its already extensive storm-warning service.

As I told you when I talked with you two weeks ago, the Weather Bureau keeps tab on storms at sea by reports from private ships. Hundreds of vessel masters radio weather reports to the Weather Bureau twice a day as they ply their regular trade routes in certain ocean areas. If a storm seems to be brewing, the Weather Bureau broadcasts a request to all vessels in that vicinity to send in reports. The Weather Bureau also has observers stationed on islands off the coast. From all of these reports, the weather men can follow a storm and get an idea of how bad it is days and days before it reaches land.

But there is this difficulty about getting reports from the private vessels. As soon as a ship runs into one of those tropical hurricanes, or hears about one from the Weather Bureau broadcasts it heads for safe water. It gives the Weather Bureau an account of the storm as it looks back over its shoulder, so to speak.

Some folks say the government ought to put a ship patrol in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea during the hurricane season to report a hurricane as soon as it starts and follow right along in the center of it to keep tab on its course and speed.

Mr. Tannehill tells me such a patrol would be helpful but there are many difficulties.

In the first place, the weather men have no evidence that a tropical hurricane starts just as a little whirl in one spot. The weather men think a hurricane forms in unsettled weather over a big area. So they see no reason for ships to patrol the seas hunting for baby hurricanes that don't exist.

In the second place, a patrol big enough to cover the entire "breeding ground" of the hurricanes would cost a lot of money.

In the third place, sending ships and men into the center of a full-fledged hurricane to follow its course is pretty risky business. The lives you might save on land because of these patrol ship reports on the storm should be balanced against the lives of the crew on the patrol ships, that would be endangered by the terrific winds and tremendous seas of the storm.

And finally, Mr. Tannehill wonders just how much good a patrol ship could do after it got into one of those hurricanes. A wind of 75 or 100 miles an hour would be tossing the ship around like a chip of wood. The storm would now and again change its speed and its direction. Under those conditions, a ship master would have great difficulty in navigating to keep pace with the storm.

At the present time, the Weather Bureau gives storm warnings 12 to 24 hours in advance of the storm. Twelve to twenty-four hours usually is enough for folks to take any of those precautions I mentioned a moment ago. The Weather Bureau is willing to use reports from patrol ships if provided and thinks they would be valuable. But it realizes the many, many difficulties, dangers and the great cost of putting the patrol ship plan into operation.

ANNOUNCEMENT: That was the Weather Man. Two weeks from today, at this time, he will bring you another story about the weather.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

ERRATA NOTICE

One or more conditions of the original document may affect the quality of the image, such as:

Discolored pages
Faded or light ink
Binding intrudes into the text

This has been a co-operative project between the NOAA Central Library and the Climate Database Modernization Program, National Climate Data Center (NCDC). To view the original document, please contact the NOAA Central Library in Silver Spring, MD at (301) 713-2607 x124 or Library.Reference@noaa.gov

HOV Services
Imaging Contractor
12200 Kiln Court
Beltsville, MD 20704-1387
July 23, 2010