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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Dr. Charles F. Brooks,  
of Clark University,  
discusses:

DUST IN THE AIR

The atmosphere, particularly near the surface of the earth, contains vast numbers of small particles. Such particles may be organic, including bacteria and the spores of plants, often of microscopic size. Over mountains and oceans there is at least one such particle to every cubic meter, in crowded houses the number may run up to 80,000 in the same space. But still more numerous are the inorganic particles usually spoken of as dust. Indoors they are often plentiful and large enough to be plainly seen in a beam of light. One set of observations gives numbers per cubic centimeter, or one-fifteenth of a cubic inch, under various conditions:

Outdoors, raining, 32,000 per c.c.; outdoors, fair, 130,000 per c.c.;  
In a room, 1,860,000 per c.c.

One puff of cigarette smoke may contain as many as four billion particles.

Dust comes from innumerable sources, from the ground, from volcanoes, smoke, the evaporation of ocean spray, meteorites, plants, and animals.

Lest we regret too much the necessity of living in a dusty atmosphere, it is well to remember that only excessive dust is injurious, and that dust has its important functions. Dust particles act as centers of condensation for moisture, reflect and scatter light, and they absorb heat and decrease the loss of heat from the earth.

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