

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SPRING THE FOREST FIRE SEASON

The forest fire hazard is greatest in the intermediate seasons when there is neither snow on the ground nor leaves on all the trees. At any time of year, the lower the relative humidity the greater the risk. A recent study of Minnesota forest fires, by Miss Dorothy V. Noble, shows that May is distinctly more hazardous at various humidities than April or June, and that September is worse than August and a little worse than October. There are contrasts that would be expected from the presence of snow cover or wet ground in April, and, to some extent, in October, and from the abundance of green leaves in June, July and August. Other tabulations, by P. W. Stickel, of the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station, and M. F. Burrill, show that April and May are the worst forest fire months in the northeastern region. The low humidities of last week, falling even below 15 per cent. at Washington, D.C., gave the fire season a strong start.

In the West the worst months are sometimes spring, but more often are late summer or early autumn. One reason is the snow cover and another is the rather dry summer season punctuated by "dry" thunderstorms. While but 7 per cent. of the forest fires in Maine appear to be started by lightning, well over 30 per cent. of the western fires are due to this cause.

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