

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ICE STORMS

Five years ago Massachusetts experienced one of the worst ice storms in its history. This storm continued for three days, and ice accumulated to unprecedented thicknesses. The ice on ordinary insulated electric wires reached three inches in diameter and weighed nearly a pound and a half per foot. Ice on a large evergreen tree fifty feet high and twenty feet wide would have weighed about five tons. Everywhere in Worcester trees were wrecked and wires and poles dragged down, making the utmost confusion. Electric car lines were badly crippled and many communities were without telephone and electric light service for days or even weeks after the storm. The New England Telephone and Telegraph Company alone had to order 400,000 pounds of copper wire and over fifty carloads of poles to repair their lines. On the whole, the damage to property was estimated as over \$3,000,000.

It will be remembered that an ice storm is commonly caused by two counter-currents, a warm wind above overrunning a cold wind pushing in below. Rain forming above freezes on striking cold surface objects. Usually an ice storm is a transition stage between ordinary rain and snow, or between a snowstorm and a rain. In the case of the famous ice storm of November 26 to 29, 1921, referred to above, the two currents, warm and cold, remained surprisingly well balanced. The temperature of the lower one did not rise enough above freezing to prevent the continued formation of ice, while the wind above, after the first brief fall of snow, remained continuously so much above freezing that rain fell without ceasing for nearly seventy hours. Much sleet also fell, the total precipitation of four inches being twice as much as the accumulation of solid ice on horizontal surfaces.

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