A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE COLD WAVE'S CARPET

The flurry of snow, or , sometimes, the snowstorm that precedes a cold wave, is to the southward spread of the cold air approximately as is the tread for the progress of the caterpillar tractor. The snow blanket - however thin it may be at times - provides a cold surface for the cold air. It protects the cold air against the warming effect of the ground and, by its reflecting quality, it minimizes the heating of the surface by the sunlight.

It does more. The cold wind is a dry wind, thirsty for water. Snow evaporates from the surface, the vapor taking heat as it goes. And when the wind blows clouds of this snow into the air the opportunity for evaporative cooling is greatly increased. If the weather were animate, we could say - How clever of the cold wave to lay a cold snow carpet, so it can travel without getting its feet warm!

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