

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HURRICANE RAINS AND FLOODS

The havoc wrought by West India hurricanes and other tropical cyclones is usually the combined effect of wind and water, and in many cases the latter is the more destructive agency of the two. The great waves that spread out from the storm not only produce a heavy surf when they reach a coast, but also cause a general rise of the ocean surface -- a "storm tide" -- by which low-lying shores may be inundated. The worst of these floods occur when the storm tide comes at the normal time of high water due to the ordinary ocean tide.

Another cause of destruction, exemplified in the recent Florida storm, is the torrential rainfall that is a usual feature of tropical cyclones. As much as 20 inches may fall in a day or two during the passage of the storm, and there have been cases in which the fall was much greater. Thus at Baguio, in the Philippines, a rainfall of 46 inches occurred in 24 hours during the typhoon of July 14-15, 1911. This is more than the average rainfall of an entire year at most places in the eastern United States and Canada. The floods resulting from these great downpours cause damage in various ways. One of their effects is to soften and wash away the soil, thus permitting the accompanying winds to uproot trees on a large scale.

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