

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
March 10, 1930.

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed March 3, 1930.

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

HUMIDITY AND FOREST FIRES

Dry air is more conducive than any other element of weather to the spread of forest fires. Dry air, in this connection, means air of low relative humidity, which is measured on a scale of percentages. According to Charles H. Dague, a "fire-weather" specialist of the U.S. Weather Bureau, relative humidity is generally recognized on the Pacific coast and over many other forested regions as well, as the best index of the inflammability of forest material. It provides a simple fundamental basis for determining when fires will burn most readily, when they may be brought under control most easily, or when they will not burn at all.

There are, he says, other important factors for rating forest fire hazards, such as strong winds, steep slopes and intense heat from burning materials, but fires will soon die down and remain in a smoldering stage or go out altogether if the relative humidity becomes high, regardless of wind, slope or heat.

The importance of relative humidity as a controlling factor of forest fire hazard is so well recognized in the Pacific Northwest that the Logging Underwriting & Inspection Association writes a special policy containing a humidity warranty for logging risks, whereby a logging operator is granted substantially reduced rates on the premium of his policy if he agrees to suspend all logging operations during all periods when the relative humidity is 30 per cent. or lower.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

-----  
SCIENCE SERVICE  
21st and B Sts.  
Washington, D.C.