

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE COSTLIEST LIGHTNING STROKE

Probably the costliest lightning stroke in all history was the one that occurred on the afternoon of July 10, 1926, at the United States ^{Naval} Ammunition Depot at Lake Denmark, N.J. The bolt struck one of the numerous magazines at that place about 5:15 p.m., and black smoke was immediately seen issuing from the building. The first of a series of tremendous explosions took place five minutes later. These shook the country for miles around, tore houses from their foundations, hurled vehicles off the highways and darkened the sky with barrages of smoke. For days big shells, depth bombs, cans of high explosives and cases of powder continued to explode, as fire or a stray shell reached one building after another. Thirty-one lives were lost and the property damage reached \$93,000,000, including that done to hundreds of buildings in nearby towns and villages. This figure probably exceeds the total losses due to lightning throughout the world in an average year. Strange to say, the same year that witnessed this unprecedented disaster in the eastern part of the continent was marked by the occurrence in California, a few months earlier, of oil fires due to lightning with aggregate losses of \$20,000,000.

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