

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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NEGLECTED FORECASTS

The weather forecasting services maintained nowadays in all civilized countries are of enormous value to mankind, but it is quite safe to say that their potential value is vastly greater than their actual value. A certain large percentage of the public gets no direct benefit from weather forecasts, though everybody might do so in one way or another. The average citizen could cut down his fuel bills in winter and prevent some of his outings being spoiled by showers in summer if he kept close watch of the daily weather predictions.

In the commercial and industrial world there are innumerable instances of partial or complete neglect of the forecasting services by interests that have a large stake in the weather. Here is a case in point:

Until a few years ago the railroads centering at St. Louis experienced serious losses every winter in connection with shipments of sand and gravel to that city from surrounding points. These materials were loaded wet into coal cars. If a cold snap occurred before unloading, the material froze solid in the cars and they could not be dumped. This resulted in demurrage charges and the tie-up of rolling stock that was often badly needed on the lines. The situation prevailed for years before the railroads adopted the obvious remedy of getting regular temperature forecasts from the Weather Bureau and sending warnings of impending freezes to the shipping points. Now, when such warnings are received, the loading of cars is suspended and cars already loaded are dumped instead of being sent forward to destination. The companies report savings of thousands of dollars a year through this practice--which could just as well have been adopted many years sooner.

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