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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MEASURING FOREST HUMIDITY

Measuring the relative humidity of forest air as a test of the fire hazard is rapidly becoming a routine practice among the woodsmen of the United States and Canada. Lumberjacks who had never heard of this weather element a few years ago now talk as glibly about it as they do about tote-roads, skidways and stumpage. They not only talk about it, but they watch with eager interest the instruments that record it. In many logging camps a pool is made up every day on the minimum relative humidity, as pools are made up aboard ship on the day's run, and the men let dinner wait while they consult the instrument that tells them whether they will be permitted to smoke in the afternoon.

In the Douglas fir region of Washington and Oregon humidity instruments are found universally in logging camps, because a logger cannot get insurance on his equipment and felled timber, except at prohibitive rates, unless he agrees to maintain such instruments on his operation and to suspend work whenever the humidity falls below 30 per cent. In the Pacific Northwest this value has become a somewhat arbitrary dead-line between safe and unsafe weather for logging.

Instruments of several kinds are used in the forests for measuring humidity. Sling-psychrometers are the most common, despite the fact that 40 or 50 per cent. of these fragile instruments are broken every year by the husky observers who whirl them in the air before taking a reading. Dial hygrometers are also in use, while at some of the big camps may be seen the hygrothermograph, an elaborate device that makes a continuous record of temperature and humidity; both of which are factors in "fire weather."

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