

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
June 27, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 20, 1932

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

HUMIDITY AND FOREST FIRES

The word "humidity" is familiar to the man in the street as the name of something that adds to weather discomforts in the dog days. "It's not the heat, but the humidity" is the classic explanation of sensations all too common during our North American summers. To loggers and lumbermen the word has, in recent years, become equally familiar in another connection.

Striking relations have been found to exist between certain types of weather and the prevalence of forest fires. Some states of the atmosphere are conducive to fires; others check or prevent them. In both cases the weather element that plays the leading part is humidity. High humidity is a safeguard against forest fires. Low humidity is the worst fire hazard of the forest.

These remarks refer to what is technically called "relative humidity"; meaning the ratio between the amount of invisible water vapor present in the air and the greatest amount that can be present at the prevailing temperature. This ratio is expressed in percentage.

Measuring the relative humidity of the air as a test of the fire hazard is rapidly becoming a routine practice among woodsmen in the United States and Canada. The lumberjacks, many of whom had not even heard of this weather element a few years ago, now talk about it as glibly 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. When the humidity falls below a certain point, smoking is prohibited.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

-----  
SCIENCE SERVICE  
21st and Constitution Ave.  
Washington, D. C.