

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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FIRE-WEATHER SERVICES

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The United States and Canada are, I believe, the only countries in which the official meteorological services have organized a system of reports and warnings concerning the atmospheric conditions affecting the fire hazard in forests. The fire-weather service of the United States Weather Bureau is carried on in eight districts, with headquarters at San Francisco, Portland (Ore.), Seattle, Spokane, Chicago, Boston, Albany, New York and Asheville (N.C.), and with general supervision from Washington. The U.S. Forest Service conducts much research concerning fire weather at some of its experiment stations. The Meteorological Service of Canada issues fire-weather forecasts for the forestry officials in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and British Columbia.

A novel adjunct of the fire-weather service in California is a mobile forecasting unit, conveyed to the scene of every big fire by a radio-equipped truck. A meteorological station is set up, and a radio operator copies detailed coded weather broadcasts, emanating from the Weather Bureau in San Francisco. The meteorologist, with his mobile weather station, charts the data, and after analyzing conditions at the fire issues localized forecasts specifically adapted to fire suppression uses. During five years of operation, the unit has served on about 245 fires, the largest burning nearly 220,000 acres.

According to L.G. Gray, of the Weather Bureau: "Fire departments in Berkeley, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Pasadena, and other places, find the forecasts and humidity data of the fire-weather service useful in city fire work. The information has been valuable in getting personnel and equipment ready for expected fire outbreaks, in controlling grass and brush fires, and in regulating absences of department personnel. Insurance companies find that weather conditions affect their risks, and premium rates are, to some extent, based on the 'fire climates' of different localities. This applies to insurance on standing timber, hay, grain and city structures."

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