

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"AND SUDDEN DEATH"

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

It appears that the essay "And Sudden Death," originally published in the Reader's Digest and subsequently reprinted as a separate pamphlet and in many newspapers, has had the desired effect. Its enormous circulation has resulted in a gratifying decrease in automobile accidents.

It is a well known fact that the horrors of many disasters due to the forces of nature can be greatly mitigated by means of suitable precautionary measures. Earthquake-proof architecture, the International Ice Patrol, radio storm warnings, tornado cellars and the like have already averted a great many deaths and much suffering. Would not such safeguards be more widely utilized if, in the public schools and elsewhere, the gruesome details of natural disasters were vividly presented?

Dr. William de Kleine, of the American Red Cross, wrote a few years ago after visiting the scene of a tornado:

"I wish I could convey a word picture of the casualties witnessed -- they were the most mutilating I have ever seen. I doubt that modern warfare could be more destructive. There were critical injuries of nearly every part of the body; injuries of the head seemed to predominate. There were scalp wounds of every description; deep gashes on the head and face; faces bruised and swollen beyond recognition; ears partly or nearly severed; eyes partly gouged out; fractures of the skull and wounds of the face and jaw; craniums pierced by large splinters; simple and compound fractures of the clavicle; fractured ribs; puncture wounds of the pleural and abdominal cavities; fractures of the bones of the back resulting in complete or partial paralysis below the point of fracture; simple and compound fractures of every variety of arms and legs; abrasions and lacerations of every part of the body.

"Injuries resulting from tornadoes are much more severe than in other types of disaster. The terrific force of the whirling winds, flying and twisting splinters and other objects cause ghastly and mutilating wounds, which are further complicated by dirt and splinters driven into the tissues. I have frequently heard nurses in hospitals say that they could not get the patients clean for several days; the dirt just had to wear off."

Compare this description with the bald statistical statement that, in the tornado that visited Blankville, twenty people were injured!

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