Dry Lightning

Rain is sometimes good news to firefighters battling wild land blazes. But the threat of summer thunderstorms in the western US often puts firefighters on the alert. In the dry West, the humidity is often so low that rain falling from thunderstorms evaporates before reaching the ground. This phenomenon is called “virga.” Even though the rain doesn’t make it to the ground, flashes of lightning streak from the clouds to the ground. This lightning can start fires in dry woods with no rain to extinguish or slow the blazes. Lightning accounts for a large number of the forest fires in the West. Courtesy of USA Today.

Weather Spotter Checklist

- **FUNNEL CLOUD or TORNADO**...Watch for rotation in cloud and damage
- **HAIL**...Pea-sized or larger
- **HEAVY RAIN**...1/2 inch in 1 hr; 1 inch in 12 hrs; 1.5 inches in 24 hrs.
- **HEAVY SNOW**...4 inches in 12 hrs; 6 inches in 24 hrs
- **FLOODING**...of any kind. Is the water level rising or falling?
- **POOR VISIBILITY**...1/2 mile or less in blowing dust, rain, or snow.
- **TRAVEL PROBLEMS**...Any conditions where poor or hazardous travel conditions observed or reported.
- **STRONG OR DAMAGING WINDS**...Any winds estimated to be over 40 mph. Or winds that produce any damage. Estimate using Beaufort chart.
- **ANY DAMAGE, INJURY OR LOSS OF LIFE DUE TO WEATHER**...Be sure to include location, time and specific cause.

If you observe any of these conditions, please call the NWS in Spokane and make a report at (509) 244-0435

 Editor’s Notes

Summer finally arrived - or did it? In a matter of weeks, we will be moving into autumn with the start of school and gardens maturing. This has prompted us to release the fall edition of the Weather Watcher. In this issue, we highlight fire weather and give an overview of our brief severe weather season. We also have several staff changes which we would like to announce.

The main purpose of this publication is to keep weather spotters and our users informed about our services and programs, and to recognize those who help us accomplish our mission. We will continue to see many exciting changes in weather observing and forecasting in the near future. Weather spotters and observers, in addition to our friends in the media and emergency management, will continue to be an extremely valuable part of our mission.

If there is something you would like to see in the next newsletter or have comments about a previous issue, please let us know.

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(509) 244-0110
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All articles are written by the Spokane NWS staff. A special thanks to Robin Fox, Ron Miller, Bob Bonner, Brenda Rheinecker and Gary Bennett for their contributions.
Severe Weather Review

Due to the dry and cool weather pattern, there were relatively few thunderstorms during the first half of the summer. In June, there were only two thunderstorm days with reports of severe weather - both of which occurred in extreme southeastern Washington and adjacent areas of northern Idaho. During the early evening on June 15th, a severe thunderstorm tracked across Garfield county, WA and produced dime size hail in Dodge. Dime size hail was also reported in Cragmont in Lewis county, ID in the late afternoon on June 24th, while hail of golf ball size pelted nearby Granville.

The weather remained tranquil through July. But by the first week of August, thunderstorms returned and persisted over eastern Washington and northern Idaho. The weather culminated on the 6th of August with a few storms reaching severe strengths. These storms produced heavy downpours, small hail and winds up to 40 mph. Frequent lightning also lead to countless fire starts.

A warm thanks to the many spotters, sheriffs, HAMs, observers and emergency managers who called in with their timely reports. Ground truth is vital when the weather takes a turn for the worse. Your reports help the NWS keep public well informed on approaching severe and hazardous weather.

Dry and Cool Summer

The dry and cool weather pattern over the Inland Northwest during the spring continued into the middle of summer. Temperatures in all three of the past months have been below normal by about 3°F. All but 8 days in May were colder than normal for the area. The Spokane Airport received snow on five days in early May. By the end of the month, things were warming up. But aside from a warm spell in the middle of the month (including record high temperatures on the 15th at Spokane and Lewiston), June also turned out to be cooler than normal. The cool spell continued into July. Record low temperatures were set at Spokane on the 3rd and 4th of July with temperatures of 40 and 42 degrees respectively. By the end of the month, temperatures had climbed to above normal readings, with Lewiston reaching 103°F on both the 27th and 28th.

In addition to being cooler than normal, the past three months have also been on the dry side. While Lewiston and Spokane received above normal precipitation in June, Wenatchee saw little more than sprinkles. Rainfall in July was sparse at all locations.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) of the National Weather Service makes the long-range seasonal forecasts for the likelihood of above, near or below normal temperatures and precipitation. The outlook for this fall is near normal temperatures and above normal precipitation.

"Looking a bit farther into the future, CPC notes that the La Niña (the cold water opposite of El Niño) which was in place last winter, has persisted through the summer and will likely influence this winter’s weather. At this point, we can expect a similar winter to last year. The CPC forecasts can be viewed on their website at www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov."

AREA WX STATISTICS

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<th>Spokane</th>
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Just as the weather is changeable, so is the staff at the Spokane weather office. This was especially true over the last few months.

Roger Buckman, veteran fire weather forecaster, officially retired at the end of July. Roger worked at the Wenatchee office for almost eleven years before the fire weather duties transferred to the Spokane office in 1997. Before he joined the NWS, his career spanned from a forecaster for Continental Airlines to a Colonel in the US Air Force. Roger and his wife Janie still reside in Wenatchee and plan to devote more time to their growing book business. Roger also plans to catch up on his yard work besides enjoying a few retirement activities.

Forecaster Eric Martello recently received a promotion to Senior Forecaster in Jackson, Mississippi. After growing up in Texas, Eric and his wife Laura were excited to move back to the South. Eric’s NWS career path has taken him to Brownsville, Texas and Goodland, Kansas prior to serving in Spokane.

Laurie Koch spent her second summer as a student intern at the Spokane office. She will return to her studies at the University of Arizona this fall. Laurie, originally from Spokane, will be starting her third year in the meteorology program and plan to devote more time to their growing book business. Roger also plans to catch up on his yard work besides enjoying a few retirement activities.

Starting in September, a new forecaster will be joining the NWS Spokane team - Paul Bos. Paul and his wife Michelle will be moving from Omaha, Nebraska. A native to the Pacific Northwest, Paul grew up in Portland and spent time in the Air Force in Tacoma.

We wish Roger, Eric, Laurie and their respective spouses the best of luck in their recent moves and achievements!

THE ROSE CORNER

Use code figure ‘69’ for snow during the past 24 hours. This is entered to the nearest tenth of an inch. For example, if you measure 2.2 inches of snow at your observation, you would report 692#. A trace is reported as 69*001# and no snow is reported as 690*00#.

Use code figure ‘68’ for snow depth. Snow depth is reported to the nearest whole inch. For example, if you measure 2.2 inches you would report 682# and 2.6 inches report 683#. If you measure less than ½ inch, report 68*001# for a trace. If there is no snow on the ground, please report a zero or 680#.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and before the snow flies, and thanks for your participation in the ROSE program!