

For the entire western half of the country (exclusive of Texas) the number of forest fires recorded so far this year is in excess of 3,300. The total number for 1939 to the same date was only a little above 2,000; the 1935-39 average was 1,931.

Figures for the eastern states, plus Texas, show an increase not quite so marked but still bad enough. There have been more than 4,000 fires in eastern and Gulf Region forests thus far in 1940, as against a few more than 3,000 to the same date last year, and a 1935-39 average of nearly 3,700.

The fires have not only been more numerous but more destructive. For every million acres of standing timber within the boundaries of national forests in the West, 145 acres have been burned, as compared with 98 acres to the same date in 1939 and the five-year average of 78 acres. The situation in the East is even more serious: 694 acres per million thus far this year as against 375 for the same period last year and five-year average of 535.

The most serious situation obtains in the Great Basin regions, including southern Idaho. The flashed report from this region reads, "Emergency conditions Idaho, becoming general elsewhere." For the region immediately to the north, which takes in the forests of the northern Rockies generally, the word is, "Approaching critical. Outlook very unfavorable." Only from the moister states of Oregon and Washington have foresters been able to report, "Weather somewhat more favorable."

## ITEMS

ULTRA-HIGH frequency radio waves were successfully used in two-way communication over a considerable distance for the first time in experiments by the Mount Washington Observatory staff. Using a frequency of 225 megacycles, or about 1.3 meters, communication was established at a distance of 90 miles. Hitherto two-way ultra-high frequency radio has been limited to a few miles only. In the present experiments both voice and code were satisfactorily transmitted.

PRODUCTION of one of the most useful of the artificial rubbers, which is more resistant to oils and solvents used in industry than natural rubber, will be increased with larger yield of acrylonitrile, a chemical essential in its manufacture. B. W. Henderson, manager of the Rubber and Rubber Chemicals Division of the American Cyanamid and Chemical Company, announces that its output of acrylonitrile had been doubled and that further increases are expected as the demand grows. Acrylonitrile is derived from cyanamide. It is combined with butadiene, a petroleum product, in the manufacture of artificial rubber.

BUILDING blocks, not for children's toys, but for teaching chemical principles, have been devised. They consist of hundreds of differently shaped pieces representing atoms and groups of atoms, distinctively colored to indicate whether they are metals or not. Arms extending from them indicate the number of other atoms they can combine with, or, as the chemist says, their "valence."

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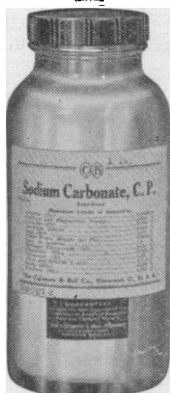


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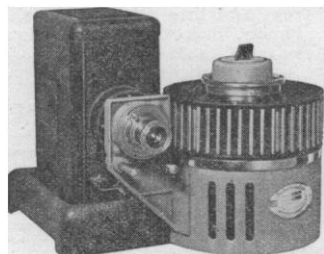
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