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Dog Days

Local attitudes toward the weather are almost as varied as the weather itself. Pride in climate takes two predominant forms. If the climate in a certain region is reputed to be pleasant, the natives take a defensive pride in it. If a visitor to northern California feels uncomfortably hot, he will be told that it is not as hot as he thinks it is, that anyway it is a dry heat and less distressing than it would be where he came from, and that besides it is a very unusual day.

If, on the contrary, the local summer climate is generally thought to be hot or muggy, the natives have a different kind of pride—pride of survival. If a visitor to a city on the eastern seaboard finds himself gasping and mopping his brow, a native will indicate that the day is really unusually good for this time of year, and he may add smugly, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

In a program begun experimentally on 1 June in a few large cities, the U.S. Weather Bureau provided a new set of figures for the weather aficionados to ponder, a "Discomfort Index." This index takes both temperature and humidity into account in attempting to estimate human reaction to the weather. The index has been devised in such a way that the resulting figures lie within the familiar range of ordinary temperatures on the Fahrenheit scale. It is simple to calculate: add the dry- and wet-bulb temperatures, multiply the sum by 0.4, and add 15. A D.I. of 75 would, for example, result from dry- and wet-bulb readings of 78° and 72° or 85° and 65° or 92° and 63°. The bureau estimates that some people feel uncomfortable at a D.I. of 70; that more than half feel uncomfortable at 75; and that virtually everyone feels uncomfortable, if not acutely miserable, at 80.

The index is of more than conversational interest. In cities where air conditioning is widely used, the index is more closely correlated with the power demands than is temperature alone. Consequently, the index should serve as a good predictor of peak loads for public utilities.

Some characteristic average D.I.'s for local noon during July and August are as follows: 64, San Francisco; 65, Seattle; 71, Denver; 73, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles; 76, Washington, Baltimore; 78, St. Louis; 80, Miami, New Orleans; 81, Tampa, Key West. The bureau has also estimated some recent record highs (dry-bulb temperatures in parentheses); 92, Yuma (119°); 89, Kansas City (112°); 85, New Orleans (96°); 84, Chicago (100°).

But if the ordinary citizen in less favored regions takes pleasure in reminiscing about past hardships and contemplates with relish forthcoming tests of his physiological adaptability, merchants, other than those who purvey Good Humors, air conditioners, and so on, do not. The publication of the index stirred up a storm of a kind with which the Weather Bureau is unfamiliar. Boards of trade and some retailers cried out in anguish that such predictions would be bad for business, and the bureau beat a hasty retreat. *Discomfort Index* metamorphosed into *Temperature-Humidity Index* and all is well, except for the fact that the bureau would like a better name than this.

The following are among those that have been suggested: Comfort Index, Temp-Hum Index, Thermidity Scale, Misery Meter, Atmosfactor, Comfort-Table, Holiday Index, Thermosation Scale, and Toler-Rate.

What is wanted is a good descriptive word with pleasant overtones. Any suggestions?—G. DuS.

Science

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G. DuS.

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