

WHAT DOES THE WEATHERMAN MEAN?

The terms your weather forecaster uses have specific meanings. His forecast will be more meaningful to you if you know just what the terms mean.

by Dwayne A. Rohweder and Robert H. Shaw

"CLEAR TO PARTLY CLOUDY"



NO RAIN IN AREA

"SCATTERED SHOWERS"



30-45% OF AREA MAY GET RAIN

"RISK OF SHOWERS"



0-15% OF AREA MAY GET RAIN

"SHOWERS"



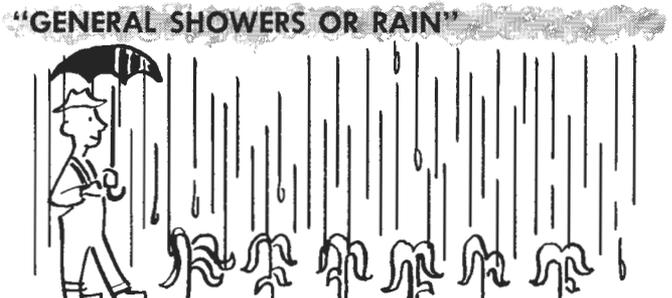
45-75% OF AREA MAY GET RAIN

"WIDELY SCATTERED (or chance of) SHOWERS"



15-30% OF AREA MAY GET RAIN

"GENERAL SHOWERS OR RAIN"



75-100% OF AREA MAY GET RAIN

WHAT DOES the weatherman mean when he says

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there's a chance of showers today? This forecast has a definite meaning to him. But, unless you know what this meaning is, you may interpret his forecast differently. The weatherman uses particular

terms in his forecast. He's familiar with these terms and intends to convey specific meanings. If you're not familiar with these terms or are uncertain of their meanings, less of his message "gets

through," and it's, therefore, less meaningful and useful to you.

Suppose the weatherman forecasts showers for your area. This could mean several things to you. To the weather forecaster, it means that he foresees the development of the kind of cloudiness that results in local and temporary precipitation. A shower may develop over an area from 1-10 miles across, move across the country for several miles and then dissipate. Another shower may be developing some miles away.

This means that your particular location may: (1) receive a heavy shower; (2) receive only a light sprinkle of rain if it is at the edge of the storm; (3) be within view of the shower in the distance but receive no rain; or (4) be even farther than visual distance from the storm. In all four of these situations, the "shower" forecast was correct.

But the weatherman can be more specific than just saying "showers." The drawings show the meanings of what the forecaster intends to convey to you when he uses the more specific terms. These terms and meanings also are summarized for you in the table on this page.

Interpret these forecasts by considering the four situations that could exist for your particular location—(1) a heavy shower, (2) only a light sprinkle, (3) see the storm but receive no rain and (4) storm not within sighting distance. The greater the area expected to receive precipitation, the greater is your chance of receiving some of it.

Other Terms . . .

We've dealt mainly with showers in this article. There are, of course, many other forecasting

Forecast terms and amount of area expected to receive measurable precipitation.

Forecast terms	Percent of area receiving measurable precipitation
Clear to partly cloudy, without mention of precipitation	0
Risk of showers	0-15
Widely scattered showers or chance of showers	15-30
Scattered showers	30-45
Showers	45-75
General showers (or rain)	75-100

terms used by the weatherman in the forecast you read, see or hear. Here are a few of the other terms and their meanings to help you know more exactly what the weatherman means:

Clear—Sky free or practically free of clouds; no more than 20 percent cloud covered.

Fair—No precipitation and less than 40 percent of sky covered by low clouds. (This term may also be used when the sun is shining through high, thin clouds.)

Partly Cloudy—30 to 70 percent of sky covered by clouds.

Cloudy—70 percent or more of sky covered by clouds of sufficient thickness to obscure the sun, moon or stars.

Overcast—Cloudy without breaks.

Variable Cloudiness—Indicates variation in the amount of clouds with respect to time or area. This term is used to show that cloudiness will increase or decrease several times during the forecast period.

Cold Wave—A temperature drop of at least 20° F. in a 24-hour period, falling to a minimum

of 5° or lower in northern Iowa, 10° or lower in southern Iowa.

Snow Flurries—A snowfall of short duration, with clearing between occurrences; total accumulation of snow expected to be small.

Blizzard—A weather condition characterized by strong winds, snow-filled air (falling or blowing) and low temperatures.

Today—The forecast is for the period 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Tonight—The forecast is for the period 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.

For More Information:

A series of eight weather articles was published earlier in IOWA FARM SCIENCE. Reprints of these articles are available for your further interest and study. They are:

- FS-743 What Is Weather?
- FS-751 The Air We Live In
- FS-757 How You and I Record the Weather
- FS-758 Clouds—the Signposts of the Sky
- FS-763 Why Our Weather Changes
- FS-772 Iowa Weather Patterns
- FS-776 How Weather Forecasts Are Made
- FS-780 Our "Usual" Weather

Single copies of each are available free of charge through your county extension office or from the Publications Distribution Room, Morrill Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

Example Forecast: Northwest, Southwest—Showers this afternoon ending early tonight. Fair tomorrow. Cooler tonight and tomorrow.



Example Forecast for Several Districts: Northwest, Southeast, Central—Rain this afternoon. Showers and cooler tonight. Tomorrow fair and cooler except partly cloudy with scattered showers early morning near the Mississippi.