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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, January 8, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The news in the Washington letter for this week is about fires, home fires in particular. And timely news it is, too, since so many fires in homes occur at this season of the year.

Writes our correspondent: "The clang of a fire engine rushing past the window this morning reminded me that it was high time for a visit to the scientists in the Department of Agriculture who are working on the problem of farm fire prevention.

"And a very big problem that is, as I learned from Harry E. Roethe, senior engineer in the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils. Mr. Roethe told me that fires on farms each year destroy about a hundred million dollars' worth of property and cause around 35 hundred deaths! Yet his investigations prove that this huge loss of life and property is largely unnecessary. Most of it comes from such common and easily prevented causes as defective chimneys and flues, sparks on the roof, spontaneous combustion, defective and improperly installed stoves and furnaces, and careless use of matches, gaoline, kerosene, and so on.

"As you may guess, these are some of the chief causes of fires in winter-time and of home fires especially. Yet they are hazards that most families could prevent. Mr. Roethe believes that the housewives of the nation could do a lot to change our national fire record. He thinks that once women understand what fire hazards are and how to make their houses safe, half the battle against fire will be won.

"So, for the sake of your listeners, I'd like to mention Mr. Roethe's leaflet again. I'm sure you've seen it and remember that it contains 7 pages of good helpful practical ways to prevent fires. And several of these pages give advice on prevention of home fires."

Listeners, I'd like to interrupt this letter long enough to tell you that this leaflet our correspondent mentions goes by the name of "Fires on Farms." The number is 44. And while the free supply lasts, you are welcome to a copy for your housekeeping library. Write for it to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

Now to continue the letter: "Another scientist who has been investigating fire prevention from another angle is Dr. Martin Leatherman, also of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils. Dr. Leatherman has been working to find simple, practical and inexpensive ways to treat household fabrics so they won't burn. (Think how many disasters might have been prevented if children's clothes, and ironing board covers had always been fireproofed.) Not there are simple ways to fireproof these articles at home.

"Dr. Leatherman says that because cotton fabrics and other cloth made up largely of cellulose, catch fire most easily, they are the important materials to treat -- more important than wool and silk which burn less readily. Among the articles that he suggests be fireproofed are children's play suits; rugs that lie in front of open fireplaces or near living-room stoves; curtains and draperies near flues and open fires; ironing board covers and kitchen pot-lifters; and trimmings for Christmas trees. He also advises that it is a good idea to have a fireproofed canvas blanket on hand for emergencies -- what he calls a 'fire smothering blanket.' Other articles worth fireproofing are fabric screens that stand in front of fireplaces, fabric panels that hide wood or coal for the fireplace, and fabric heat deflectors for stoves. All these are serious home fire hazards.

"It's just too late to mention that Christmas tree ornaments may also be fireproofed, especially the cotton often used for snow. But that's something to remember for next year.

"Speaking of cotton, reminds me of what Dr. Leatherman reports about cotton as an insulating material in building houses. Both cotton and sawdust are good insulators but up until recently were dangerous to use because they were a fire risk. Dr. Leatherman suggests that fireproofed loose cotton is an excellent insulating material and that treated sawdust is especially effective when spread over ceilings in unfinished attic -- a part of the house, you know, where heat losses are often very great.

"Fortunately, the best fireproofing treatments to use a home are the simplest. Dr. Leatherman has found most satisfactory a mixture of boric acid and borax in water because this solution not only fireproofs the fabric but makes it last longer. Small articles like children's clothes, curtains and ironing-board covers you just dip in the solution and then hang to dry. Large unwieldy articles like heavy draperies and rugs and so on you can spray with the solution.

"By the way, of course, this fireproofing comes out in the next washing and must be repeated. It also comes out whenever the fabric is wetted -- as in the case of a curtain that hangs where the rain comes in.

"I don't know why I'm writing all this when I am enclosing the new bulletin that gives all the details so much better than I can and has very helpful illustrations."

So, listeners, here's still another fire-prevention publication for your home library. The name of the new bulletin is "Fireproofing Fabrics." It is Farmers' Bulletin No. 1786.
