

Mull Problem of Fog Control

Every winter in the north sits toasting the cozy open fire. In Londoners those evenings have been bogged down by the fog. The total cost hasn't been totted up yet, but it's bound to run into millions of dollars.

Airlines were the biggest sufferers financially. More than a dozen international lines had to postpone flights for as long as 48 hours.

British Overseas Airlines, for instance, postponed 19 long-distance flights over one week end—and it costs BOAC \$12,000 dollars every time one of their transatlantic planes is held up.

It cost a lot in frayed tempers, too, and got Britons asking, "How can we stop it?"

There's little the chemists and scientists don't know about fog—except how to stop it easily.

They know it's caused by what the experts call "a condensation of moisture always present in the atmosphere." In other words, when you have no wind, clear skies at night and a dropping temperature you've got ordinary fog.

Shake all this up with a few hundred tons of assorted grit, dust and specks of coal and you've got the famous London "pea souper."

The pea souper has to be seen to be believed—and then you wish you didn't. It's dank. It smells thick and greasy. It swirls about you and past you in yellow oil surges.

It clogs in your hair and on your clothes. It gets stuck in your lungs. You can't see even certain where you've come from. People shuffle miserably past you like horrid shapes in a nightmare.

Down the river Thames at Greenwich, where the government has set up a fuel research station to investigate air pollution, they think they've got the problem nearly licked as far as industry is concerned.

They've managed to get home to industrialists the point that money going up in smoke isn't just a phrase, but a fact. Local laws have been adopted prohibiting too much smoke from factory chimneys.

But that's just half the problem.

The householder still sits in front of his fire and doesn't bother about half his fuel bill going up the chimney in smoke.

According to Dr. E. T. Wilkins of the research station there were about eight tons of smoke per cubic mile hovering over Greenwich during the last fog. Mix that up with some of the 300 tons of grit that settles over Britain every year and there's your perfect pea souper.

The ideal answer, of course, is to wean the Briton away from his open fire and then give him smokeless fuel.

"This isn't as easy as it sounds at present, however. Coal-short Britons have to take what fuel the coalman supplies these days and the few types of processed coal are expensive.

Britain's nationalized coal industry is busy on the problem at its research station and there are hopes that within a couple or so years some way of carbonizing ordinary coal may be discovered that will wipe out the smoke menace.

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