

## RAINY SPRING CAUSING PROBLEMS FOR EAST COAST RESIDENTS

June 25, 2003

*Even if it didn't rain from now until September, most states along the East Coast will have gotten more rain this year than they've seen since Hurricane Agnes hit in 1972.*

The weather, whether we know it or not, has affected almost every part of our lives. From cancelled softball games, to lingering skin problems, to an increase in household pests.

"We've had an average of two out of three days of rainfall," says Keith Eggleston, a climatologist at the Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University in New York. "Usually during June you get about one day out of three."

Miami absorbed 11 inches of rain in May, double its average. Atlanta broke its record, set in 1923, with 9.94 inches of rain in May. Virginia, Tennessee, West Virginia and North Carolina, all had their second-wettest May on record, and according to Eggleston, many cities like Wilmington, Del., Newark, N.J., Philadelphia and Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania are all close to setting records for the month of June.

The reason for this "persistent weather pattern" as climatologists call it, is not clear. What is clear is that the rain, along with the soggy soil, humidity, and miserable, gray days, has caused problems for many people that would typically have melted away with the last days of winter.

"Skin conditions usually found in the winter months, are sticking around thanks to all the moisture and lack of sunshine," says Dr. Richard Wyatt, a dermatologist in Amherst, Mass.

Improvement in skin problems like eczema, that tend to get better in the spring and summer because of sun exposure, are delayed because of the cloudy days.

Ants, millipedes, mold, allergies, frizzy hair, even pimples can also be leftover guests of the wet spring weather.

"I've had ants in previous years but just a few here and there," says Maria Van Horn, an Alexandria, Va. mother, who has lived in her home for three and a half years. "This year I've noticed many, many, many more."

Van Horn has laid 15 ant traps in her kitchen and is not alone in her misery. According to Jerry Bukowsky, an exterminator for Terminix pest control, the ant this season has overtaken the cockroach as the creepy crawly of choice.

They are coming through cracks in walls, poorly fitting screens, across electrical wires and through doorways. The reason: all the rain has forced them from their homes into ours.

"People are calling on a daily basis, frantic," says Bukowsky. "'I've got ants all over my house.' It's a real problem."

## What's causing all the rain

So, why all the wet weather?

Keith Eggleston says his group has been unable to pinpoint the reason, but can say with certainty, "we can't blame El Nino," the disruptive atmospheric system in the Pacific Ocean that influences climates around the globe and is often blamed for unusual weather in the U.S.

"El Nino is extremely weak right now so it's not having any impact on what's happening right now," Eggleston says.

He adds that though the pattern of wet, rainy weather is not unusual, the length of time it has stuck around is.

"This year, that particular weather pattern has just been very persistent and we haven't been able to work our way out of it," he says.

The news is little consolation for Christiana Briddell, a Virginia farmer, who sells her vegetables at local farmers' markets. Like many farmers this year, Briddell has seen her crops destroyed by the bad weather, and the planting season for many crops delayed.

Though leafy greens like lettuce and spinach like the water, don't count on Virginia-grown basil for your spaghetti sauce anytime soon, or crunchy cucumbers for your summer salad.

"Our cucumber planting got destroyed by the rain," Briddell said. "It got completely waterlogged and died."

Pennsylvania farmer Pat Rice said her sweet corn has also been hurt. "We have two plantings in but we couldn't get the third one in because of all the rain," she said.

And even the corn that did get planted won't be at the supermarket any time soon. Corn that usually arrives in July won't be in until early September, Rice predicts.

Even if the sun is currently shining, don't count on it for much longer. Much of the East Coast can expect a chance of thunderstorms for the weekend, according to the National Weather Service, possibly taking cities like Philadelphia to the eighteenth or nineteenth rainy weekend out of 25 since January 1, according to the city's daily news web site.

Eggleston does say there are some signs of encouragement in the nice weather we've had this first week of summer.

"We have to have a fairly strong system move through that will kick things out and get the normal progression of weather patterns going again," he says.

People all along the coast have their fingers crossed that he's right.

*By Kristina Nwazota, Online NewsHour*