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1978

PRIZE-WINNING NEWSPAPER  
of the  
CALIFORNIA NEWSPAPER  
PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

# Opinion

## Sentinel Editorial

# Average Rainfall <sup>3/29/79</sup>

With the latest rainfall, it appears that Santa Cruz is headed for an unusual year, a rainfall that is average.

Actually, average rainfall really depends upon what base you use for the figures. Normally the state figures use a 30-year period for their data.

In Santa Cruz at the end of this weather season, we will have a 100-year history of precipitation records compiled by the volunteer observers of the U.S. Weather Bureau.

The average for the 100 years is going to be right around the 28.50 inches mark. The average for the 30-year period now in use - 1941 to 1970 - is 31.37 inches.

Beginning in 1980-81, the state will use a new 30-year period from 1951 to 1980 in assessing the average mark which will be around the 30-inch mark, or somewhat lower than the current average.

Just to make the subject a little more unusual, in the past 50 years, we have never had a seasonal rainfall in the 28-inch range, the 100-year-average.

The wettest year in history was in 1940-41 when Santa Cruz had 61.62 inches of rain. The lowest rainfall occurred in 1923-24 when we had 10.85 inches of rain.

In the 100-year period, the frequency of unusual rain years is as follows:

More than 60 inches, 1.

Between 50 and 60 inches, two times, once in 1889-90 and again in 1957-58.

Between 40 and 50 inches, 10 times, the latest in 1972-73.

Between 30 and 40 inches, 26 times, the latest last year was 1977-78.

Under 20 inches, 22 times, the latest in 1976-77 when the seasonal rainfall was 15.93 inches.

Under 15 inches, five times, the latest in 1975-76 when the rainfall was 13.88 inches.

The drought years from 1975 through 1977 was the only time the area experienced two extremely dry years in a row.

The same situation happens with "wet" years. The only time we ever had three wet years in a row came in the period from July 1, 1939 to June 30, 1942. The first year we had 44.75 inches, the second year the record 61.62 inches and the following year a rainfall of 42.15 inches.

Back in 1968-69 and 1969-70, we had two wet years with rainfall of 44.26 inches and 44.03 inches.

The wettest month on record came in December of 1955, the year of the flood in Santa Cruz when 21.07 inches fell in the 31-day period.

In 1909, 19.90 inches of rain fell in January while in 1902 there were 14.74 inches of rain in February. The record for March was in 1903 with 11.06 inches while in 1941, April recorded 7.66 inches.

The May record is 5.55 inches in 1955 while in 1884 there was 2.48 inches of rain in June. There has never been a rainfall of one inch or more in July or August, although in 1918 it rained 6.60 inches in September. The October peak was 9.50 inches in 1889 while the November record was 11.39 inches in 1950.

The wet months on the average are December and January with January slightly higher, 5.82 inches to 5.63 in December.

Areas in the San Lorenzo Valley and in the Santa Cruz Mountains get considerably more rain than Santa Cruz. The really wet areas are Ben Lomond, Boulder Creek, Empire Grade and Laurel.

With rare exceptions, the normal rainfall is highest in the valley, drops about 40 percent in Santa Cruz and by another 50 percent when it gets to Watsonville.