

Weather Prediction Stormy Business

OKLAHOMANS were both amused and irritated last week when they read the morning weather forecast that "No snow was predicted" from Monday through Friday. Immediately after breakfast it snowed hard for a couple of hours.

This is not typical, because any Oklahoman, with or without meteorological training, can forecast the weather correctly at least 50 to 75 percent of the time. Just use a daily prediction: "Fair to partly cloudy, with little change in temperature."

It's the changeable 25 per cent that is hard to forecast. A National Weather Service meteorologist said recently: "We do a pretty good job of predicting the commonplace, but often as not we'll blow the important forecast."

That's why private weather forecasting has become a big business.

Nationally, the sizeable number of private weather forecasters is indicated by a listing in Business Week magazine. Oceanroutes, Inc., Palo Alto, Cal., employs 65 meteorologists to plot sea routes for 450 steamship lines. Murray & Trettel, Inc., Chicago, monitors weather for power plants. Accu-Weather, Inc., State College, Pa., forecasts weather for nearly 400 clients.

"The National Weather Service generates almost all the data that private forecasters massage into their predictions, but it does not have the time, funding or manpower to do as good a job itself," says the Business Week article.

Actually, the federal government has at least a dozen separate agencies involved in weather research, forecasting and modification. All

leave quite a bit to be desired from standpoints of vision, leadership, coordination and effectiveness.

An example of these deficiencies occurred in mid-February when the Los Angeles Flood Control District seeded clouds to increase rainfall as a major storm was approaching. Floods resulted. An official explained they did not always believe the forecasts.

The Oklahoma Water Resources Board is sponsoring a Weather Modification Seminar in Oklahoma City March 9, in which scientists and others will discuss problems related to these weather needs. It will be open to the public.

Weather is global in scope, but its effects are local. One of the obstacles to possible solutions to weather matters seems to be that those involved with it can't see both ends.