

MSU Weather Station Marks 125 Years of Service



Carl Blair checks National Weather Service thermometers that record the 24-hour high and low temperatures on the Mississippi State University campus. Blair checks and records weather data from instruments that monitor rainfall, evaporation rates, wind movement and soil, water and air temperatures each morning before reporting for other duties as an equipment operator with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station. Weather data from the Starkville campus has been collected and recorded every day for 125 years.

Photos and Story by Bob Ratliff

Each morning Carl Blair, like many people, checks the weather, but his interest in the weather is part of a tradition that goes back 125 years.

Blair is an equipment operator for the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at Mississippi State University, and his duties include recording data collected by National Weather Service equipment located on campus.

At 6:30 each morning, rain or shine, he gathers information on rainfall, evaporation rates, wind movement and soil, water and air temperatures during the past 24 hours. Once collected, the data is sent to the National Weather Service in Jackson.

There are few other sites in the nation with 125 years of continuous weather data on record, said Alan E. Gerard, meteorologist in charge at the Jackson office of the National Weather Service.

“This type of information is what you need to investigate things like climate change,” Gerard said during May 3 ceremonies on the MSU campus celebrating the 125-year weather data collection partnership.

Knowledge of weather history is also an important part of crop research by MSU scientists, which is one reason there are also weather stations at most of the 16 MAFES sites around the state.

“The weather and agriculture are inseparable,” said Reuben Moore, MAFES associate director. “Mississippi soybean producers, for example, are planting about a month earlier than they were just a few years ago. The early planting has dramatically increased soybean yields, and planting recommendations are based in part on weather history.”



To commemorate MSU's 125 years of weather data collection, the National Weather Service presented the university with a framed certificate of honor and a replica of the August 1888 weather data reported by then Mississippi A&M College. The readings for Aug. 20 include a notation of high winds resulting from a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico on that date.