

## PEAT Deposits Under Some Conditions Are Serious Fire Hazard

The large peat deposits in the United States constitute, under some conditions, a fire hazard which may result in a disastrous fire.

Peat, a substance consisting of partly carbonized vegetable material, the result of the decomposition of various plants in the presence of water, when dry burns readily. The hazard of peat fires becomes serious in periods of drought and excessive evaporation, especially if the soil is drained.

In recent years a number of serious peat fires have occurred. In May, 1928, fires in piles of dry peat in northeastern Netherlands were reported to have caused an extensive loss of property. Similar fires occurred in the Netherlands in 1880 and 1917. Considerable areas have been burned over in other foreign countries, as, for example, in Yugoslavia in 1920.



FIGURE 181.—Peat soil cracked by severe drying in section southeast of Lake Okeechobee, Fla.

Serious fires broke out in peat soil in the Everglades of Florida during the winter and spring of 1928. Specialists of the Department of Agriculture who were sent to the affected territory to make a survey of the situation found that approximately 1,250,000 acres of peat had been burned over, the depth ranging from a mere surface burning in some sections to severe burning several feet deep in others. So far as could be ascertained no lives were lost, and only a few buildings were destroyed.

Apparently the peat fires in Florida were caused indirectly by drought, evaporation, and drainage, and directly by clearing-off operations and by careless hunters, trappers, and smokers. Although press reports had ascribed most of these fires to spontaneous combustion of the peat soil, the survey did not bring out any confirmatory evidence that spontaneous ignition caused any of the fires. Whether peat soil or peat in storage is capable of igniting spontaneously, however, is a question that can be settled only by experimentation.

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## PECAN Shelling Plants Increase With Demand for Cracked Kernels

The demand for pecan kernels during recent years has grown steadily with the development of the pecan industry as a whole. By far the largest

portion of the product is absorbed by the confectionery and bakery trade. This growing taste on the part of the consuming public for