

1941.

NEW ZEALAND.

FIRE BRIGADES OF THE DOMINION

(REPORT ON THE) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1941, BY THE INSPECTOR OF FIRE BRIGADES.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

THE INSPECTOR OF FIRE BRIGADES TO THE HON. THE MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

Office of the Inspector of Fire Brigades,
Wellington, 28th August, 1941.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the thirty-third annual report, for the year ended 31st March, 1941, on the working of the Fire Brigades Act, 1926.

DOMINION FIRE WASTE.

The loss by fire in New Zealand during 1940 was £722,692, being an increase of £62,079 on the losses for 1939. This increase is probably due in the main to the higher values of both buildings and contents involved in fire. The fire losses in fire districts for the year ending 31st March, 1941, and which are therefore not strictly comparable with figures for the whole Dominion, were £242,689, which is a reduction on the corresponding figures for the previous year.

The losses in large fires (over £5,000) still appear to be the determining factor in the annual fire losses for the Dominion. The losses in these fires are shown in the table set out below and, while not as high as for the previous two years, they are still substantial. It is evident the cycle of large fires referred to in last year's report is continuing. Owing to the war it has not been possible to obtain much of the statistical information on which the previous reports were based, and for this reason the comparative tables previously published have been discontinued.

Fires with Loss exceeding £5,000, Year ending 31st March, 1941.

Locality.	Day and Date.	Time.	Occupation of Premises in which Fire occurred.	Cause of Fire.	Loss.
Auckland	Thursday (27/2/41)	12.36 a.m.	Lead-mills and plumbers	Unknown	£ 9,000
Dunedin	Tuesday (25/6/40)	5.17 a.m.	Brewery	Unknown	45,999
Timaru	Friday (28/3/41)	2.18 p.m.	Millers and biscuit-factory	Unknown	22,914
Wellington	Tuesday (23/4/40)	2.35 a.m.	Clothing-factory and electrical engineering works	Spontaneous combustion	15,135
Wellington	Thursday (18/7/40)	8.50 a.m.	Apartment-house	Hot ashes placed in wooden box	5,234
Wellington	Tuesday (8/10/40)	2.4 a.m.	Warehouse and offices	Radiated heat from gas-ring	5,203
					103,485

DEATH AND INJURY IN FIRES.

During the year fires were responsible for nineteen deaths and fourteen cases of serious injury. Of the deaths, fifteen were caused by persons being trapped in burning buildings, one by clothing catching light, and two by use of petrol for home dry-cleaning. Of the nineteen fatalities, five involved children, all of whom were trapped in burning buildings. There is one other fatality which calls for special comment, and that is the case of a man who was knocked down and killed by a fire engine responding to a fire call which turned out to be a malicious false alarm. It is doubtful whether any appeal to the persons with the warped mental outlook which results in the giving of these false alarms would be successful. The only effective deterrent would appear to be the imposition of a heavy penalty on detection, and the fact that one of these false alarms has resulted in the death of an unfortunate bystander may cause the Courts to view the offence in a more serious light.

EMERGENCY FIRE PROTECTION.

During the year under review it has been necessary to discontinue almost entirely the ordinary inspection work and to concentrate attention on the preparation of an emergency fire-fighting organization. A technical committee consisting of the Superintendents of the principal city brigades was set up to advise the Government on the fire-protection measures necessary to meet conditions likely to arise in the event of enemy attack. The recommendations of this committee were in the main accepted by the Government, and arrangements were made for the establishment of an emergency fire service of 2,100 men in the cities and larger secondary towns. The general conditions of service of this force are similar to those applying to the Territorial Army, and the Government and the local authorities are co-operating in the provision of the extra fire-fighting equipment necessary for emergency operation. Most of this equipment is being manufactured in New Zealand. The necessary authorizing regulations were gazetted in February, 1941, and recruitment and training had been commenced before the end of the year.