

INSPECTIONS, ETC.

During the year visits of inspection to the number of 8,916 were made. Complaints were received respecting 434 alleged breaches of the Act, resulting in 4 prosecutions and 162 warnings. In 131 cases investigation showed that no breach had been committed, while in the remaining cases no action was considered necessary. Two prosecutions were instituted for breaches which were discovered by Inspectors, and warnings were given in other cases, being either first offences or of a minor nature. Convictions were secured in all cases; the fines totalled £20. No case calls for comment.

There were 426 requisitions served to comply with various requirements of the Act, such as for lime-washing, safeguards for workers employed on machinery, &c., sanitary conveniences, fire-escapes, dust-extraction, renovations and structural alterations, heating-appliances, lighting, ventilation, spray-booths for duco work, first-aid appliances, and dining-rooms in the case of establishments employing over six women and girls and boys under sixteen, also provision of drinking-water.

BOYS AND GIRLS IN FACTORIES

The Factories Act, 1921-22, provides that a boy or girl under sixteen years of age shall not be employed in any factory unless the occupier holds from the Inspector a certificate of fitness relating to the boy or girl. Issue of a certificate is subject to age, education, and fitness qualifications. Documentary evidence of age and education is called for, but in respect of fitness the Inspector has regard for the trade and occupation involved, including considerations as to lifting of weighty articles, the particular factory and the working-conditions therein, and the appearance and physique of the young person concerned. Pursuant to these requirements Inspectors issued 3,263 certificates during the year (boys, 1,706; girls, 1,557). This is a considerable reduction on the previous year, when the issues were: Boys, 2,153; girls, 2,145; total, 4,298.

There has been public comment regarding the number of boys and girls under sixteen years of age being granted permits to work in factories. The number of permits issued last year—viz., 3,263—is less than for any of the three years prior to the war, the figures being: 1936-37, 4,462; 1937-38, 4,016; and 1938-39, 4,150. It has been pointed out above that Inspectors of Factories are in a position to protect young persons who enter factory employment. There is, however, no similar power in respect of other avenues of employment, except that the Agricultural Workers Act, 1936, prohibits the employment for hire or reward of a child under the age of fifteen years on any dairy-farm. Thus young persons who are refused permission to work in factories may enter undesirable employment elsewhere.

INDUSTRIAL VENTILATION

With the introduction of black-out and semi-black-out conditions, the Department instructed its Inspectors to watch carefully that ventilation requirements were maintained. It will be appreciated that the fitting of screens to windows and other light sources impedes the inflow of fresh air, and the workers may then suffer from impure air and a temperature rise. Many simple means of overcoming this exist, these being based upon the principle that, while light beams travel in a straight line, air will flow around projections. Inspectors have been able to advise factory occupiers on ventilation problems, and the necessity to introduce special extraction or induction air systems to meet temporary conditions has to a large extent been avoided.

INDUSTRIAL LIGHTING

It is accepted that good lighting is a considerable factor in productive efficiency, and the Department has, over a period of years, given special attention to the problem of adequate industrial lighting. Whilst there is much room for improvement in some factories, there has been considerable success in the effort to secure the proper utilization of natural light, with suitable supplementary lighting where necessary, also an improved standard of artificial lighting, particularly in those factories where work is performed during the hours of darkness. With the onset of emergency conditions, supply and labour difficulties have caused progress to be interrupted. Such conditions really constitute an additional argument for improved lighting, as productive efficiency in munitions units is a major necessity. Further, the introduction of black-out or semi-black-out conditions has involved the necessity for light-traps that themselves impede the full utilization of natural light during daylight hours. Many of the new factories erected are models so far as good lighting is concerned.

SKIN IRRITATIONS ARISING OUT OF INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES

Oil Acne.—In three separate factories where the work of turning or drilling required the use of special lubricating-oil in the process, cases of oil acne or dermatitis occurred. In such cases prevention is all-important, workshop hygiene needs attention, and machines should be so guarded as to prevent the operators being splashed. Filtration and sterilization of the oil may be necessary, while adequate washing-facilities for the workers are essential, personal cleanliness being a factor of major importance. The cases referred to above were dealt with in conjunction with officers of the Health Department, and the hygienic measures introduced appear to be coping with the outbreaks.

Lacquer Dermatitis.—Difficulty arose at several food-canning establishments and was attributed to solvents in the lacquer. The introduction of further automatic means of handling the tins during the lacquering process reduced the incidence of this trouble, while investigations showed that the irritation was increased by the pyriden which is added to commercial methylated spirits in New Zealand.

Dust from Insulating-board.—Investigations are proceeding concerning a suggestion that dust created in sawing and handling a brand of insulating-board is injurious to the workers.

SURVEY OF EARTHQUAKE DAMAGES IN INDUSTRIAL PREMISES

Following the two earthquakes in June and August, 1942, a survey of factory and workshop premises as well as workplaces connected with mercantile and commercial activities was made in the Wellington and Masterton districts. As a result, requisitions were served on a number of occupiers to carry out repairs or protect workers during repair operations. The number of requisitions was very small relative to the number of cases where repair work was involved, as much necessary repair was undertaken voluntarily or pursuant to direction by local authority. This Department is carefully watching the safety of workers in premises where the damage was not immediately dangerous.

ABSENTEEISM.

The problem of absenteeism in industry is one that has engaged the attention of this and other countries. Loss of working-time may be due to a variety of causes, and, while much can be done