

MINING AND QUARRY ACCIDENTS

In metalliferous mines, at which 1,562 men were ordinarily employed, one person was killed and five persons seriously injured.

At stone-quarries under the Stone-quarries Act, employing 1,672 men, four persons were killed and three persons seriously injured.

In coal-mines where 5,374 persons were ordinarily employed eight persons were killed and thirty persons seriously injured.

MINERALS OTHER THAN GOLD

There has been continued interest in the development of mineral deposits whose value has been enhanced owing to their importance in the prosecution of the war, while shortage of overseas supplies of others has directed attention to local sources.

The returns from such work have not always been all that could be desired, but some measure of disappointment is inevitable to mining, and without courageous prospecting the worth of mineral deposits can never be established. With it all there has been progress in the development of New Zealand mineral resources, and it is now possible to assess their value to the community with some degree of certainty. The overseas supply of many minerals has now responded to stimulation due to the urgent needs of war to such a degree that, from being in drastically short supply, they are now accumulating in stock piles and war needs are being adequately met, so that marked recession in demand and consequent fall in value seem inevitable.

It is of interest to note the increasing demands upon the mining industry for minerals used as fertilizers or in the preparation of fertilizers, as is indicated in the notes following that cover the production of phosphate, serpentine, magnesite, dolomite, and limestone. It is apparent that production of such minerals must become of increasing importance with succeeding years.

Scheelite.—As anticipated in my Statement for last year, production of scheelite in 1943 showed a marked increase over that in the preceding years, but it is to be regretted that the response to development has been delayed until such time as the drastic shortage of supply of this mineral to the Allied Nations has been adequately met from overseas sources.

In all the equivalent of 116 tons of 65-per-cent. tungstic acid content concentrates was produced in 1943, as against a production of 70½ tons of similar grade concentrates in 1942. This increase is due in part to the activities of the State scheelite-mines, which contributed approximately 40 tons to this total, and to the completion of the development and equipment of small claims by private interests with a strong measure of financial assistance from the Mines Department. It is of interest in this connection to note that some parties, to whom large sums had been advanced, have already been able to repay the moneys advanced in full from the sale of scheelite concentrates. The supply position of tungsten-ores, as far as the Allied Nations are concerned, has now enormously improved, and demand has correspondingly weakened, so that the future of the market is uncertain. It is gratifying under these circumstances to be able to report that the Imperial authorities have renewed their contract price of £6 sterling per unit for the nine months ending 31st December, 1944, in respect of 50 tons, any production in advance of this figure to be purchased at a price of £5 sterling per unit. So far this year production has been well maintained, as producers are making every effort to market the maximum amount possible while demand still holds and the price is satisfactory.

Mercury.—Operations were continued at Puhipuhi by Mercury Mines, Ltd., and a further 3 tons 3 cwt. of mercury were produced. The company's activities were severely hampered during the year owing to large slips at the quarry-face, which, combined with unpleasant weather conditions, precluded any possibility of production for many months. Operations have now been suspended at the Ascot Mine, where the Mines Department was carrying out some investigations. The tonnage of mercury-ore available proved to be too limited to warrant the erection of a furnace, while the ore did not prove amenable to concentrating to small bulk.

Manganese.—Some 500 tons of manganese-ore were produced during the year from the area held by Mirandite Products, Ltd., for shipment to the United States of America. While the tonnage available is limited, the ore is of excellent grade for metallurgical purposes.

Arsenic.—It is of interest to note the production of arsenic as a by-product from the roasting of concentrates at the Blackwater Mine prior to cyanidation for their gold content. There has been a small production from this source for some time, and during the year 8 tons were recovered and sold locally for manufacture and use in New Zealand.

Asbestos.—An all-weather motor road has now been completed to the asbestos deposits in the Upper Takaka district operated by the Hume Pipe Co. In addition, excellent accommodation has been provided for the staff, and the treatment plant, which has been improved, now awaits provision of power from the Cobb River scheme. After operating under many difficulties, the company now has all the facilities to make a thorough investigation of their deposits. From operations during the present year some 188 tons of asbestos fibre were produced.

Mica.—Some further prospecting work was done on the mica deposits in South Westland, and the few pounds of dressed mica produced had a ready sale to a local radio-manufacturer. However, it was realized that continued investigation was dependent upon improved access which would also allow of the construction of housing adequate to meet the rather severe weather conditions. To this end, a