

NEW ZEALAND FIRE LOSS

34. The latest year for which national figures are available is 1944. The insured loss was £478,000. With usual addition for uninsured loss this makes an estimated total loss for the year of £537,750. This may be regarded as very satisfactory, comparing as it does with an average of £642,590 for the previous five years. The fire loss in fire districts shown in the statistical table attached to this report evidences a considerable increase on last year. This is mainly due to an unusually high loss in large fires, a list of which is appended. Practically half the loss in both this and the preceding year has been due to serious fires in Government stores—at Palmerston North in 1944-45 and at Te Awamutu during the current year. This fact is stressed, because £243,700 out of the £251,270 loss at Palmerston North and the whole of the £415,000 loss at Te Awamutu was uninsured and will therefore not appear in the annual fire-loss figures published by the Government Statistician. Excluding the fires in Government stores referred to, the loss in fire districts for 1945-46 does not disclose any abnormal increase not accounted for by the increased replacement value of property.

Locality.	Day and Date.	Time.	Occupation of Premises in which Fire occurred.	Cause of Fire.	Loss.
Auckland ..	Tuesday, 10/4/45	3.06 p.m.	Golf club	Unknown	£ 8,075
" ..	Thursday, 12/7/45	3.04 p.m.	Box factory	"	29,650
" ..	Saturday, 8/12/45	2 a.m.	Block flats	"	5,020
Dunedin ..	Thursday, 27/9/45	3.45 a.m.	Linseed-oil factory	"	67,402
" ..	Thursday, 7/3/46	5.58 a.m.	Plastics-factory	"	40,212
Hamilton ..	Friday, 21/12/45	10.08 p.m.	Warehouses and offices	"	16,000
" ..	Wednesday, 2/1/46	11.26 a.m.	Private hotel	"	5,828
" ..	Monday, 11/2/46	6 p.m.	Shops and offices	"	5,318
Invercargill ..	Wednesday, 13/2/46	10.24 p.m.	Foundry and engineering shop	Sparks from adjacent factory	8,800
Pahiatua ..	Tuesday, 19/6/45	9.10 p.m.	Drapery and furniture store	Unknown	20,556
Te Awamutu ..	Sunday, 24/2/46	9.5 a.m.	R.N.Z.A.F. stores	"	415,050
Wanganui ..	Friday, 1/2/46	9.17 p.m.	Motor-body builders	"	9,474
Wellington ..	Sunday, 9/12/45	9.14 a.m.	Warehouse and shops	Arson	5,557
" ..	Monday, 17/12/45	2.18 a.m.	Tire-store and vulcanizers	Suspected arson	7,059
" ..	Friday, 21/12/45	3.06 a.m.	Joinery-factory and timber-yard	Lighted cigarette in contact with saw-dust	9,715
Total					653,600

35. It is necessary to call attention to the very considerable increase in the number of property fires occurring. The average in fire districts for the five-year period 1940-45 was 989. In 1944-45 there were 1,391 of these property fires, and in the year under review the number has increased to 1,801, or nearly double the pre-war average. The fact that losses have not increased proportionately is probably due partly to an element of luck and partly to the increased efficiency of the Fire Service and the improvement resulting from the intensive training during the war years and the supply of additional equipment purchased for emergency purposes. If the increase in the number of fires continues, the initiating of some fire-prevention measures will be a matter for urgent consideration by the proposed central authority, should legislation on the lines proposed be prepared during the coming year.

I have, &c..

R. GIRLING-BUTCHER, Inspector of Fire Brigades.