

Table 1.—Fires with Loss exceeding £5,000

Locality.	Day and Date.	Time.	Occupation of Premises in which Fire occurred.	Cause of Fire.	Loss.
Auckland ..	Thursday, 7/8/47 ..	1.0 a.m.	Engineers	Oil in contact with hot furnace	£ 37,000
" ..	Sunday, 14/12/47 ..	9.18 p.m.	Confectionery-manufacturers	Unknown	10,100
" ..	Monday, 15/3/48 ..	5.31 p.m.	"	"	168,500
Christchurch ..	Thursday, 21/8/47 ..	7.12 p.m.	Motor-body builders' factory	"	11,619
" ..	Saturday, 20/9/47 ..	11.10 a.m.	Electrical warehouse	Spark from furnace ..	28,365
" ..	Tuesday, 18/11/47 ..	3.46 p.m.	Departmental store ..	Unknown	317,640
Dannevirke ..	Tuesday, 20/6/48 ..	6.9 a.m.	Shops and offices ..	"	17,000
Dunedin ..	Friday, 20/6/47 ..	12.5 p.m.	Picture-theatre	Stage curtain in contact with electric lamp	5,389
Greymouth ..	Friday, 18/7/47 ..	5.55 a.m.	Municipal buildings ..	Unknown	19,040
Hamilton ..	Tuesday, 18/11/47 ..	5.9 p.m.	Shops and offices	"	8,424
Invercargill ..	Wednesday, 10/12/47	10.7 p.m.	Store, warehouse, shops, and offices	"	43,418
Pahiatua ..	Wednesday, 29/10/47	12.45 a.m.	Shops and flats	"	23,143
Palmerston N.	Friday, 9/1/48 ..	9.5 a.m.	Felmongery and wool-store ..	"	7,000
Petone ..	Thursday, 21/8/47 ..	12.40 p.m.	Motor-body builders' factory	"	5,829
Wellington ..	Friday, 31/10/47 ..	5.30 a.m.	Radio-factory	"	21,439
" ..	Tuesday, 11/11/47 ..	3.33 a.m.	Slipper and shoe factory ..	Not established (possibly lighted cigarette in clothing in men's locker-room)	5,000
" ..	Friday, 14/11/47 ..	5.59 p.m.	Furniture-factory	Not established (possibly spark from flocking-machine in contact with teased flock)	10,100
" ..	Thursday, 20/11/47 ..	2 a.m.	Printing-works	Not established (supposed printers' ink in contact with cotton waste in locker)	9,090
				Total	748,096

FIRE-PREVENTION

Attention must again be directed to the serious increase in both the number of fire calls and of fires involving loss of property shown in the attached statistics. The average figures for the past three years are fire calls 7,517, property fires 1,798, as compared with the average of the three years' preceding the war of 4,064 calls and 859 property fires. This increase is too large to be accounted for by the increase of urban population. It is evident that, if the high fire-loss cycle is to be checked, some fire-prevention activity on the lines recommended in my last report must be undertaken. It is worthy of comment here that if this fire-prevention work is to be effective the publicity must reach the business man, the office and factory worker, the householder, and the school-children. Experience has shown that organization on a national basis is necessary, but the effort must be in the main a local one in each centre.

LOSS OF LIFE IN FIRES

In addition to the forty-one lives lost in Ballantyne's fire, referred to below, four other persons were burned to death in a fire at the Franz Josef Glacier Hotel in July, 1947. Throughout the year there were also fifteen isolated cases of death resulting directly from fire. Two of these involved shock from burns, and thirteen were caused by fires in dwellings. The fatalities included two infants, and in one case particular attention was drawn by the Coroner to the danger of leaving young children alone in a building.

CHRISTCHURCH FIRE DISASTER

The heaviest loss of life by fire in New Zealand history, and one of the most serious property losses, occurred in the departmental store of Messrs. J. Ballantyne and Co., Ltd., in Christchurch, at about 3.30 p.m. on 18th November, 1947. In all, forty-one lives were lost and the fire-insurance pay-out was £317,640. The circumstances of the fire and the reasons for the loss of life were investigated by a Royal Commission in an inquiry lasting more than six months. A very full report has been issued, but a brief description will be of interest to those to whom the report is not available.

The premises consisted of seven adjoining brick buildings mainly of three or four stories, with wooden interior construction. They had been converted for store purposes