

Prosecutions.—A total of 63 prosecutions were taken in respect of milk samples and 34 in respect of other foods. In other cases of non-compliance, warnings have been issued.

Seizure of Unsatisfactory Food.—On 357 occasions, consignments of food found to be unsatisfactory were seized and destroyed. These foods included tinned fish, fruit, sausages, flour, sugar, miscellaneous food damaged by sea-water, almond meal, rabbits, and nuts.

Drugs.—In past years very little routine sampling of drugs has been undertaken. A start has now been made to undertake routine sampling of a large range of drugs, and during the latter part of the year 95 samples were taken covering a fairly wide range of drugs. Most of the samples obtained from the larger manufacturing chemists were found to be satisfactory, and shortcomings were chiefly evident in drugs prepared or repacked and relabelled by pharmacists who undertook this as a side-line to their normal business.

DAINGEROUS DRUGS AND POISONS

Consumption of Heroin.—In last year's annual report mention was made of the increasing consumption of heroin in New Zealand. The Permanent Central Opium Board has recently published figures showing the estimated importation and manufacture for local consumption of dangerous drugs in the various countries that supply returns, and it is of interest to compare the estimated importation of heroin into New Zealand with that in other countries. The following countries do not import or manufacture heroin: United States of America, Austria, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Mexico, Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia. The following countries use less than 1 kilogram per million of population: Eire, Holland, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, U.S.S.R., Argentine, India, and Ceylon. Great Britain, Denmark, France, and Norway use between 1 kilogram and 3 kilograms per million of population. The corresponding figure for New Zealand is nearly 5 kilograms per million of population and is exceeded by one country only—namely, Finland. As stated in last year's report, the consumption of heroin increased markedly between the years 1944 to 1946. The Department communicated with a number of medical practitioners who appeared to be prescribing heroin with unnecessary frequency, and it is satisfactory to record that the consumption of heroin during 1947 fell from 7.8 kilograms to 6.4 kilograms. It is hoped that the figures for 1948 will show a further drop. As showing the extent to which a medical practitioner may thoughtlessly increase his prescribing of heroin one may quote the case of a doctor whose prescriptions for heroin during one winter month were 20 per cent. of his total prescriptions. In the corresponding month of the following year, after the matter had been brought to his notice, the proportion of heroin prescriptions had fallen to 2 per cent.

The dangerous potentialities of this drug cannot be too often stressed. Heroin is five to six times as toxic as morphine and the margin between its effective dose and its toxic dose is very narrow. Of the various types of drug addiction, heroin addiction is the most difficult to cure. The prognosis of heroin addiction is extremely bad, even under relatively favourable circumstances.

New Dangerous Drugs.—Two new synthetic drugs—amidone and methyl dihydro-morphinone (commonly known as metopon)—will shortly be brought within the scope of the Dangerous Drugs Act. Both drugs have recently been declared dangerous drugs in Great Britain. Amidone is also sold under the names, methadone, dolophine, and physeptone.

Poisons Act and Regulations.—A quantity of caustic soda improperly packed and labelled was found to be on the market. Caustic soda must be packed in tins having a press-on lid to admit of satisfactory closing if the whole of the contents are not used at one time, whereas the tins in question could only be opened with a tin-opener and could not thereafter have been sealed. The importer was required to withdraw all stocks from the market, and the caustic soda was subsequently used for manufacturing purposes.