

IN counties with a high fire hazard the provisions of the Act are being enthusiastically administered by the County Councils concerned; and with greater knowledge of the powers conferred by the Act the somewhat hesitant action apparent during the previous fire season was not evident during the 1948-49 fire season. Those counties with a lesser fire risk are also taking a greater part in the administration of the Act.

There has been some confusion in catchment districts owing to Catchment Boards being empowered to make by-laws prohibiting the lighting of fires. However, in all cases that have come under notice confusion and duplication have been avoided by co-operation between the Boards and Fire Authorities, provision for which is contained in the Act.

An important provision of the Act authorizes a Rural Fire Officer to prohibit certain operations during periods of fire danger within his district. In a time of emergency the issue of an order by radio will undoubtedly be necessary, and accordingly arrangements have been made with the National Broadcasting Service for the broadcasting of such orders.

To assist the National Broadcasting Service, a roll of Rural Fire Officers is being compiled and will be supplied to that Service for reference purposes. An order for broadcasting may be sent direct to the broadcasting station concerned or through the nearest Conservator of Forests or other forest officer. In any case, the latter officers will be consulted to establish the authenticity of an order, and whether it complies with the provisions of the Act, before it is broadcast. It is provided under the Act that Fire Authorities may act together in the exercise of their powers, and it is important before any order is issued that a Fire Authority should consult adjoining Fire Authorities, because it may be desirable for one order to cover several counties or parts of counties, particularly an order prohibiting the lighting of fires. This procedure was followed in some districts during the past fire season; and in some instances joint action has been agreed upon between counties and between counties and Catchment Boards.

There was a complete absence of serious fires during the last fire season, no doubt due to the activities of local Fire Authorities in hazardous districts; and as the organization for the prevention, detection, control, and suppression of fires is strengthened it can be expected that serious fire damage will become history. Close supervision and keen administration are necessary to achieve the objective of the total elimination of dangerous fires throughout the Dominion, and at the same time to assist primary production; but experience during the comparatively short period that the Act has been in operation shows that it will prove an effective instrument when it is fully understood and implemented.

2. *Fire Damage*.—The total number of recorded fires in State forests during the year was 32, of which 24 occurred in indigenous forests and 8 in exotic forests. The area affected was 502 acres; but all except half an acre was tussock, fern, and cut-over land. One fire in an exotic forest unfortunately resulted in the destruction of a forest workers' hostel which was nearing completion.

There were 40 fires outside State forests, affecting an area of 2,024 acres. Of these, 4 fires in private plantations destroyed 552 acres of exotic forest. The remainder were in tussock, fern, and scrub country. Three sawmills were destroyed by fire, and one was damaged by fire following lightning. Details are as follows:—

Destroyed—

Townsend and Lithgow, Mangatapu.

Canterbury Sawmilling and Timber Co., Ltd., Pudding Hill.

Kopara Sawmilling Co., Ltd., Totara River.

Damaged: Aitken and Gillespie, Ltd., Christchurch.