

I am pleased to report that there has been a substantial addition to the number of automatic fire-alarms installed in the larger or more dangerous risks, and there is now a total of fifty-nine, as against forty-four last year, an increase of fifteen, made up as follows: Auckland, seven; Christchurch, six; Dunedin, two. This is a movement in the right direction, for as one means to the prevention of large losses the automatic fire-alarm system cannot be too highly commended, and it is to be hoped that many more will be installed.

With the object of assisting in the standardizing of at least the smaller appliances, the Government has imported a set of patterns of various-sized nozzles ranging from $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter, also of V thread $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. couplings and branches. Drawings were made of these, blue prints were taken off, and are now available to the whole of the fire service of the Dominion. Several of the Boards, the executive of the United Fire Brigades Association, and various firms of fire-appliance manufacturers have applied for and been granted the loan of a print, and already a number of orders have been placed for appliances to be made in accordance with the Government patterns.

A number of amendments to the Fire Brigades Act are at present under consideration by the Government.

A matter to which I consider it proper to direct attention is the want of interest in the actual well-being of the brigade shown by resident members in some of the smaller fire districts. Not only has this come directly under my own notice, but I have heard it commented upon by the officers and members of various brigades, and where this lack of interest is so palpably exhibited in connection with volunteer or partially paid brigades it must have a detrimental effect upon their efficiency as a whole. Also, several instances have occurred wherein local fire brigades have made injudicious purchases of comparatively expensive appliances wholly or in part unsuitable for their purposes, thus causing unnecessary expense and even absolute loss that probably would have been avoided had I been consulted in the first place.

It is much to be regretted that some of the smaller boroughs, when installing a water-supply system in their respective towns, are not better advised as to the adequacy, for fire-protection purposes, of the proposed scheme, both for the time being and with a view to future requirements. Several instances have come under my observation wherein serious mistakes, economic as well as utilitarian, have been made in that direction, and as an illustration in point I would mention the case of a growing town that I was asked to inspect and report upon very recently. A gravitation system had been installed only within the last four years, and, although there is a sufficient head and an ample supply of water is available at the headworks, the carrying-main for a distance of nine miles had been laid down in such a manner and of such diameters that the output at the borough boundary is computed to be only 275 gallons per minute—a quite insufficient volume; and, further, the larger portion of the reticulation consists of 3 in. piping. To increase the output the cost means to this small town a most serious matter indeed, whereas in comparison a small increase in the initial cost of installation would have provided an ample supply for all purposes for years to come.

A total number of 678 calls were received by the brigades throughout the fire district, as against 686 for the previous year, a decrease of 8. As compared with 1912 there has been a large reduction in the number of false alarms, 127 as against 238, a decrease of 111, but an increase under all other headings—viz., chimney fires, 60 (45), increase 15; bush, rubbish, &c., fires, 64 (42), increase 22; out-of-districts fires, 30 (14), increase 16; and particularly in the number of actual fires, 397 (347), an increase of 50.

Of the 397 fires, 17 have been returned as due to incendiarism or suspected incendiarism, 13 have occurred in unoccupied premises, and 144 origin unknown. As in previous years, an analysis of the reports sent in show that over or excessive insurance is still very prevalent.

Losses throughout the Fire Districts.—The total fire loss for the year was £121,654, and compares with the previous year as follows:—

	Insured. £	Uninsured. £	Totals. £
1911-12	174,651	42,387	217,038
1912-13	102,661	18,993	121,654
Decrease	71,990	23,394	95,384

So that, notwithstanding the substantial increase of fifty in the number of actual fires, there is a reduction in the value of property destroyed by fires to the very large amount of £95,384. Of the twenty-two proclaimed fire districts the administration of eighteen has now been under the control of Fire Boards for a period of a little over five years, one for four years, and one for one year, with the remaining two just recently proclaimed. While the majority of the Boards have made great improvements, more or less as requisite, in the housing and equipment of their respective brigades, there are two or three that up to the present have done very little in that respect. The said improvements, for financial and various other reasons, could be carried out only very gradually, and it was to be expected that some considerable time must elapse before the new system of administration under the Fire Brigades Act could prove its real value, and the time is only now arriving when results to any appreciable extent can be looked for, and in that connection, although a large portion of the reduction in loss (£95,384) is no doubt due to purely fortunate circumstances, a fair percentage thereof must most certainly be set down to improved equipment, a greater efficiency, and the better knowledge of practical fire-extinction work now prevalent amongst the officers and members of the brigades.