

In addition to the above, periodical inspections have been made of the military camps, their brigades and equipments at Featherston, Trentham, Awapuni, Narrow Neck, and Somes Island, as also of the various forts and buildings under the jurisdiction of the Defence Department. With respect to my inspectorial duties as Departmental Fire Inspector, it is quite impossible for me to visit all the Government buildings, numbering over two thousand, but practically all of the most important buildings have been inspected and reported upon.

Following upon an invitation received from the executive officers of the United Fire Brigades Association, I attended their annual conference held at Tauranga in February last, and delivered an address to the delegates entitled "The Use and Maintenance of Some of the Smaller Fire Appliances." At the request of the conference the address is being printed for circulation amongst the brigades.

A most serious aspect of the year's work is the excessive number of false alarms received by the various brigades, totalling 267, of which number a very large proportion were given with malicious intent, in two instances resulting in serious accidents, and in one case I regret to say with fatal results—viz., in Dunedin, on the 16th May last, whilst responding to an alarm of fire, which proved to be a false alarm maliciously given, one of the brigade motor machines capsized, with the result that Foreman Baxter was killed almost instantaneously and three other firemen were more or less seriously injured; again, in Auckland, on the 12th December, whilst responding to a call, which also proved to be a false alarm maliciously given, one of the brigade motors met with an accident which resulted in serious injury to one fireman and slighter injuries to several others. The grave side of these false alarms with their possible serious results does not appear to be at all generally realized; and in addition to the principal consideration—i.e., the risk to both firemen and the general public, always attending the "turn out" of a fire brigade—there must be added the cost of wear-and-tear and repairs to the motor and other apparatus employed, together with other actual expenses incurred, altogether amounting to a sum which would greatly surprise most people. It is a very difficult matter to discover the perpetrators, and in the very few instances where the offence has been "sheeted home" the offenders have been treated with a quite mistaken leniency; but, bearing the above fatality in mind, it is to be hoped that in the case of any future conviction the punishment will be made commensurate to the offence.

The difficulty of keeping the brigades up to an efficient strength by ordinary means is becoming more and more acute, and in that connection it is to be regretted that the recommendation contained in my report for last year has not been more widely acted upon. The idea has worked successfully in several towns, and I again suggest, more particularly for the present, at any rate, as applying to towns other than the four centres, that a number of the local business people be asked to undergo a sufficient amount of fire drill so to enable them to be of assistance to the brigade in case of necessity. In the present circumstances it certainly presents itself that, quite irrespective of social position, it is a duty obligatory upon any fit person to assist the local brigade to carry out what is undoubtedly a work of national importance.

The total number of "calls" received throughout the fire districts for 1917-18 was 820, as against 775 for 1916-17, though there was a decrease in the number of actual fires 406 (421), decrease 15; also in "bush and rubbish" fires 58 (82), decrease 24; the number of "out of district" fires, 26, is the same; with an increase in "chimney" fires 63 (62), increase 1; and a large increase in the number of false alarms, 267 (184), increase 83.

Out of the 406 actual fires 26 are reported as due to incendiarism, 16 as having occurred on unoccupied premises, and 159 as of unknown origin.

The fire loss throughout the fire districts for 1917-18 amounted to £245,806, an increase of £103,630 over that for 1916-17. The disastrous fire that occurred in Dannevirke on the 22nd October last is responsible for nearly one-half (£113,834) of the fire districts' total loss, Dunedin coming next with a loss of £51,798.

The insured loss throughout the Dominion for the year ended 31st December, 1917, amounted to £578,024, and throughout the fire districts for the corresponding period the insured loss was £218,325.

Appended are the following tables:—

1. Summary of Calls attended by each Brigade.
2. Fire Loss in each District.
3. Annual Cost of each Brigade.
4. Summary of the Causes of Fires in each District.
5. Personnel and Equipment of each Brigade; also Detailed Reports dealing with each Fire District.

I have, &c.,

THOS. T. HUGO,

Inspector of Fire Brigades.

The Hon. the Minister of Internal Affairs, Wellington.