

SCAFFOLDING AND EXCAVATION ACT.

During the year 6,698 notices of intention to erect buildings and scaffoldings were received (previous year, 6,421), and 21,324 inspections were made (previous year, 20,706). The erection of large buildings in permanent materials, such as brick, concrete, and iron, has necessitated very close supervision of the gear and scaffolding used. In addition to building-work generally, excavations covered by the Act are also inspected with a view to preventing accidents to workers employed therein. Inspectors generally report that the type of scaffolding and gear used has much improved during recent years.

The number of accidents that occurred during the year ended 31st December last is 274 (of which eight were fatal), as against 254 for the previous year, an increase of twenty. Careful inquiry has been made by the Senior Inspector into all accidents, particularly the more serious of them, and it is found that none could be attributed to lack of attention by Inspectors. Seven of the accidents occurred directly in connection with scaffolding or gear; while 245 of the total of 274 accidents were of a minor nature. The number of accidents according to occupations is as follows: Labourers, 127; carpenters, 90; plasterers, 10; painters, 14; bricklayers, 5; unclassified, 28.

There were thirty-five prosecutions for breaches of the Act and regulations. Convictions were obtained in thirty-two cases, and fines totalling £80 were imposed.

Particulars of the more serious accidents are as follow:—

(1) Scaffolding was erected inside a steel tank designed for the storage of oil, and steel roof principals were being placed in position on the tank; these were hoisted on the inside of the tank, and the ends were placed upon the scaffolding. The method adopted precluded the possibility of adding a guard-rail to the structure, as it would have prevented the principals from being placed in position. A worker fell and was killed, although at the time of the accident he was not engaged in any kind of work on the scaffold. No one witnessed the accident, and no reason could be advanced by those in the vicinity to explain the cause of the deceased's fall.

(2) An engineering firm was engaged in erecting oil-tanks on which swinging stages were fixed at a height of 20 ft. A split-pin had the day before the accident been shorn off the axle of the pulley-wheel supporting one of the platforms, and the worker was preparing to put in a new pin before commencing work when the platform collapsed without warning of any kind, resulting in the death of the worker. No notice of the intention of the contractors to use a swinging stage had been given to the local Inspector of Scaffolding, and no certificate authorizing its use had been given. Proceedings were taken against the contractors for a breach of the regulations, and a penalty was imposed.

(3) A worker was cutting a "chase" out of the bottom of a brick wall on the ground floor of a building, preparatory to its demolition, when the wall collapsed, burying him under the debris, with fatal results. Instructions have since been given to Inspectors of Scaffolding to the effect that where "chases" are driven into a wall, "shores" should be used to hold it until the preparatory work of demolition is actually completed.

(4) A carpenter was working on a building, nailing on a corrugated-iron roof. He was wearing rubber gum boots, and had round his body a strong rope, which was fastened to a ventilator on the ridge-pole. The workman apparently slipped on the roof, which was wet, fell a distance of about 30 ft., and was killed instantly. No one witnessed the accident, but it was noticed that one end of the rope was still attached to the ventilator, and it would appear that the other end had not been securely fastened round the deceased's body.

(5) In the course of alterations being made to a butter-factory a concrete wall was being taken down inside the building. Scaffolding was erected to enable a principal to be put in position, and two guard-rails were erected on it. While handling a piece of timber the foreman of the job apparently slipped, fell on the scaffold, and rolled under the guard-rail. He struck a plank on the floor, and died from his injuries two days later.

(6) A painter was working on a ladder about 15 ft. from the ground when he was attacked by giddiness and fell. He died a fortnight later.

(7) A board was nailed to putlogs on a scaffold about 50 ft. from the ground. A heavy gale of wind sprang up and dislodged the board, which fell, striking a worker on the head as he stood on the ground close by. The injured man died about a day and a half after the accident.

(8) A man was painting the roof of a tank when he slipped and, falling a distance of 25 ft., received injuries from which he died the same evening. The roof was too steep for the worker to sit on with safety, and a rope fixed at the apex of the tank had been tied round his body. According to a statement made by the injured man he removed the rope to change his position, and slipped on the steep side of the roof.

(9) A signwriter, working on his own behalf, was engaged on a ladder when a person riding a motor-cycle endeavoured to pass underneath, with the result that the ladder was knocked over. The signwriter sustained serious injuries to his head. Under such circumstances an employer is required to have a person at the foot of the ladder, but in this instance the person injured was working on his own behalf.

(10) Several workers were engaged in hoisting materials in barrows by means of a lift. A barrow was not properly placed on the platform of the lift, the handles protruding over the side, with the result that it was knocked off, striking one of the workers and causing severe injuries to his head and parts of his body.

The Senior Inspector of Scaffolding has continued his visits to the various districts during the year, and reports that throughout the Dominion great care and diligence have been exercised by all the Inspectors. His visits have resulted in generally increased efficiency and in uniformity of administration and interpretation. Employers and workers appear to welcome the advice and assistance of the Inspectors. The fact that the changes in methods of construction of buildings, involving greater danger to the workers, have been satisfactorily met is shown by the freedom from accidents thereon.