

With regard to other causes of fire, one can only repeat the list that has been quoted for the past twenty-five years in these reports, most of them coming under the general heading of human carelessness—smokers throwing down lighted matches, cigarettes, &c.; smoking in bed; electric irons and similar equipment left turned on; home dry-cleaning with petrol; sparks from unattended rubbish-fires; carelessness with candles and lamps; children playing with fires and matches. All of these are represented this year as in past years and in much the same proportion.

Of the total number of fires more than half are extinguished in the incipient stages and involve the loss of a few pounds only. A comparison of the insurance companies' returns with those received from the Fire Brigade Superintendents show that only one-third of the fires occurring in fire districts require the attention of the brigade. The returns show, however, that both the small fires and those which involve heavy loss, arise from the same acts of carelessness and it is only the efficiency of the fire brigade service which prevents the total fire loss being much greater than at present.

INCENDIARISM.

The arrangement referred to in the last annual report, under which the police make special investigations into fires the cause of which is not clearly established, has been continued, and the circumstances of each case are considered by a committee consisting of the Commissioner of Police, the General Manager of the State Fire Office, and the Inspector of Fire Brigades. The files show that very great care is taken by the police in making inquiries into the *bona fides* of fires, and the members of the committee are of opinion that the publicity given by these investigations, the taking of statements from witnesses, and the occasional public inquiry before a Coroner, have a very definite value as a deterrent against incendiarism. The committee has no power of instituting a Coroner's inquiry, and in a number of instances its recommendation that an inquiry be held has not been acceded to by the District Coroner. The following figures, however, show a considerable increase in the number of inquiries held, and also in convictions for arson, as compared with the previous year.

Year.	Prosecutions for Arson.	Convictions.	Dismissals.	Coronial Inquiries into Fires.
1931	28	16	12	5
1932	27	21	6	15

DEATH AND INJURY IN FIRES.

Seven fatalities due to fires were recorded during the year. Three men were burned to death by fires due to smoking or like causes in buildings where they were sleeping alone, two men lost their lives as a result of fires in hotels, and a child was burned to death in a dwelling fire; one death was caused by the explosion of a fire-extinguisher with which an attempt was being made to extinguish an incipient fire.

The number of cases of injury to persons from fire was considerably lower than in previous years, as would be expected from the lesser number of serious fires occurring. Home dry-cleaning with petrol was the most prolific cause of injury, but fortunately no fatal fires occurred from this cause. It appears to be impossible to educate the public to an appreciation of the danger, both to person and property, arising from the use of petrol inside buildings.

HOTEL FIRES.

For a number of years past several lives have been lost each year owing to fires in hotels. In the last annual report attention was drawn to the necessity for the provision of adequate external exits from every hotel bedroom, owing to the fact that stairs and passageways form the natural draught for fire and quickly become unusable owing to the heavy smoke. It is a fairly common practice for hotels to be fitted with a fire-alarm system intended to arouse the guests in case of fire. Recent inspections of a number of city hotels indicate that in many cases these installations are quite ineffective for their purpose. In Wellington, for instance, an examination of the alarm-system in twenty public and seventeen private hotels showed the following position:—

						Public Hotels.	Private Hotels.
Out of order, or partly so	..	..	..	..	..	7	7
No provision	..	..	..	..	..	2	9
Inadequate provision	..	..	..	..	..	2	..
Hand-bells	..	..	..	..	..	2	..
Faulty installation	..	..	..	..	..	1	1
In order	..	..	..	..	..	6	..
						20	17

It cannot be too strongly stressed that in every place where a number of persons are accommodated at night, and particularly in the case of hotels where the guests are mostly transient and therefore not well acquainted with the building, it is essential in the interests of the safety of human life, that not only should adequate exits and an alarm system be provided, but that these should be regularly inspected and maintained in good order.