

is given to exercise any control over the storage of inflammable material inside buildings, or to safeguard the large stores, offices, and warehouses which have been erected in recent years. Many of these buildings, although of modern construction, have been designed without adequate provision for preventing or limiting the spread of fire, and it is important that power should be taken for the inspection of business premises with the object of removing or limiting fire hazards which may involve serious fire loss, particularly when adjoining buildings may also be affected.

There is power under the Fire Brigades Act for the making of by-laws for this purpose, but it is considered by the Department that by-laws affecting the citizens generally should as far as possible be made by the municipality rather than by an authority constituted for a special function. The Wellington City Council has recently passed a fire-prevention by-law (published as an appendix to this report), which contains wide powers of inspection for fire hazards, and which provides for the appointment of the fire brigade officers as Inspectors. It is considered that this by-law meets all necessary requirements, and it is strongly recommended that in the interests of public safety other municipalities, and particularly those in the cities and large towns, should consider making similar amendments to their by-laws.

CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS.

Owing to the pressure of emergency legislation, the Building Construction Bill, the necessity for which was emphasized in the last annual report, was not passed last session, but it is understood that the question will again come before the Legislature during the present session. During the year a number of instances have been noted where the city brigades had considerable difficulty in preventing the spread of fire owing to the faulty building design, and conversely where wired-glass windows and similar protective provisions prevented fires communicating to adjoining buildings.

FIRE BRIGADE CONTROL IN FIRE DISTRICTS.

The Fire Brigades Act at present requires that a Fire Board independent of the municipality shall be set up in every fire district. It will be seen from Table I attached that half the Fire Boards at present existing have an annual expenditure of less than £600, and the administration expenses of these small Boards (Secretary's salary, office expenses, &c.) form a considerable proportion of the cost, in some cases exceeding 20 per cent.

The work of the insurance representatives on Fire Boards has been of undoubted value, particularly in the developmental stage, owing to their professional knowledge of and interest in fire brigade work, but it will be seen from the figures in this report that this stage is now past, since about 85 per cent. of the insurable property in the towns is protected by Fire Boards already existing. Most of the country Boards hold at most four meetings a year, and the actual administration of fire brigade affairs is mainly left to the local members (municipal and Government representatives).

It is suggested that the time has arrived when it would be in the interests of both efficiency and economy to form one Dominion Board to control the financial affairs of the fire service, and, except in the case of the principal cities, or where the areas of more than one local authority are included in the fire district, to hand back to the local authorities the actual administration of the brigades. A detailed scheme to give effect to this proposal is at present under consideration.

INSPECTION.

A considerable amount of time was spent during the year in organizing the Auckland Metropolitan Fire District, and also in the preparation of the amending legislation passed during the year. It was not possible to make a complete inspection of all brigades, but the majority were visited at least once. The conditions found were generally satisfactory, but in several cases an increase in the stock of fire-hose was recommended. The adoption of controlling nozzles and the provision of salvage sheets and other equipment designed to limit the damage occasioned by water in fighting small fires has been generally advocated, and it is pleasing to note the excellent work carried out by some of the smaller brigades with this type of equipment.

As indicated in the general survey of fire-protection conditions, the standard of training appears to be improving, the principal defect being that in many cases insufficient attention is paid to drill designed to exercise the brigade in the work which would be required at large fires. Even the smaller towns have hotels, theatres, and blocks of wooden buildings, which under certain circumstances are liable to form serious fires, and it is essential that every brigade should be trained to handle this class of fire. It will be noted from the figures in Table V that during the ten years covered by the record a number of towns—notably Balclutha, Dannevirke, Hamilton, Hawera, Kaiapoi, Lawrence, and Whangarei—have experienced fire losses in a single year which represent about half the total loss in the ten-year period.

Further investigations were made during the year with respect to the water supply and reticulation in several fire districts, and in a number of cases recommendations were made for the provision of a fire-pump. The usual reports were made on inspections of public buildings and institutions, and advice has been given to Fire Boards and local bodies with regard to fire-station sites and buildings, water-supply installations, &c. Reports were also made to the Local Government Loans Board on loans proposed for fire-prevention and water supply and reticulation purposes.

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