

investigation into the causes of all fires, which has been the practice during the past few years. Details of Court proceedings with regard to incendiarism are set out in the following table :—

Year.	Prosecutions for Arson.	Convictions.	Dismissals.	Coronial Inquiries into Fires.
1931	28	16	12	5
1932	27	21	6	15
1933	13	7	6	7
1934	10	5	5	6
1935	19	6	13	1

DEATHS AND INJURIES IN FIRES.

The number of fatalities due to fires recorded during the year was fifteen, as compared with seventeen last year, and an average of twelve for the past five years. Of the deaths during the year, ten resulted from persons being trapped in burning buildings, and five from clothes catching fire. Eight of the victims were children. The number of persons seriously injured and requiring hospital treatment was twelve, and in addition a number of minor injuries were received at fires both by firemen and the general public. The use of petrol for home dry-cleaning was the cause of a number of persons being injured, but it is pleasing to note that no fatalities from this cause occurred during the year.

FIRE-PREVENTION.

The annual Fire-prevention Week was held in the early part of 1936 (30th March to the 4th April) and very satisfactory results were obtained. The organization is in the hands of the fire brigades throughout the country. Most of the members of these brigades are volunteers, and it is very gratifying to see the enthusiasm with which they undertake the large amount of work which is involved in the preparation of demonstrations, lectures to school-children, and the distribution of publicity matter, all of which are features of the fire-prevention propaganda. Broadcast talks were arranged from all the principal radio stations, and very valuable publicity to the movement was given, almost without exception, by the newspapers throughout New Zealand. This publicity is of particular value in the country districts where there are no fire brigades and where the press is practically the only medium of contact with the public.

The returns submitted to the Government Statistician by insurance companies show that, despite the decrease in the total amount of fire loss during the past few years, there has not been a corresponding drop in the number of outbreaks of fire, and during 1935 a definite increase in the number of these outbreaks was evidenced. In view of this fact it might be suggested that the fire-prevention work carried out during the past few years has been ineffective, but it should be noted that work of this character cannot be expected to produce immediate results. It is considered that it has at the least had the effect of creating some degree of public fire consciousness. A certain number of fires are inevitable, and if the propaganda results only in the more satisfactory handling of these fires by the individual when they do occur, something has been achieved. It is significant that in the fire district areas where fire-prevention has been most concentrated, the records quoted above show that the number of fires requiring the attendance of the brigades has been greatly reduced and maintained consistently at a lower level. There is also evidence that the educational work carried out has resulted in earlier calls being given to the brigades, and this again must be reflected in a reduction in the fire loss.

It is considered by all authorities that the most satisfactory means of dealing with this problem is the teaching of fire-prevention in the schools. Something in this direction has been done in the efforts of the fire brigades during Fire-prevention Week, and a certain amount of voluntary co-operation has been obtained from the teachers, but representations have on several occasions been made to the educational authorities that the only arrangement which would be really satisfactory would be the inclusion of fire-prevention in the school syllabus as part of the instruction in civics.

SMOKE-PROTECTION EQUIPMENT.

In previous reports attention has been called to the desirability of supplying fire brigades with efficient smoke-protection masks for general use. Until a few years ago the equipment provided in New Zealand for this purpose consisted either of a smoke helmet with connecting tube and bellows, a cloth helmet fitted with a filtering sponge which required to be moistened before use, or, in a few cases, a self-contained oxygen breathing apparatus. These were regarded purely as emergency appliances, only one or two units being supplied to each brigade and in practice they were used on very few occasions.

The New Zealand firemen are trained to fight fires inside the building wherever this is humanly possible, even though the work involves very severe punishment from heat and smoke. The exposure to heavy smoke atmospheres without protection has been regarded as part of the normal duty, and it is quite usual for the physical effects of this exposure to inconvenience the men for some days after operations at a serious fire, due to the accumulation of smoke in the lungs, even in cases where no medical treatment is necessary. The recent adoption by a number of the brigades of the canister gasmask has shown that both the discomfort and semi-permanent disability can be avoided by the use