

DANGEROUS GOODS.

Local-authority Administration.—No new licensing authorities were appointed during the year, and the number of local authorities which are licensing authorities under the Act remains at 163. Inspection visits to licensing authority districts have been maintained as in past years.

Departmental Administration.—Districts under the control of the Department have been visited annually as previously. During the year 2,191 licenses were issued, compared with 2,049 for the preceding year.

Legislation.—No new legislation was passed during the year, but in December, 1936, sellers of motor-spirits were brought under the Industrial Efficiency Act, 1936, which is administered by the newly created Bureau of Industry. In order to obviate the confusion attendant on any system of dual licensing the closest co-operation has been necessary between this Department and the Bureau. The application of the Industrial Efficiency Act to this industry has resulted in a considerable increase in the amount of work performed by this Branch.

Accidents.—Home dry-cleaning continues to account for a number of accidents, and though no fatalities have been reported this year there are many instances in which serious burns were received. In most of the accidents of this class the cause was the ignition of petrol-fumes by means of nearby lamp, candle, or fire, but in one case the indications are that a spark from a charge of static electricity brought about the ignition of the vapour. That charges of static electricity may be generated by the rinsing of garments, especially silken garments, in petrol is not generally realized, but it is nevertheless a fact that considerable charges may accumulate during this process, and if conditions are favourable the accumulated charge may be dissipated in the form of a spark of sufficient intensity to ignite an inflammable vapour. Whilst certain suggestions could be made to safeguard against these dangers it is not considered advisable to promulgate these, as in the hands of inexperienced persons home dry-cleaning will always be hazardous. As there are now on the market non-inflammable substitutes for petrol which are equally efficient for the purpose, any necessity for the use of inflammable liquids disappears and the soundest principle is to eschew their use completely.

An unusual accident as far as this country is concerned was the destruction of a petrol-tank wagon by fire. On cross-examination the driver of the wagon stated that he noticed one or two back-fires whilst the lorry was climbing a long hill and that when he reached the top of the hill flames leapt up through the boards at his feet. The front compartment of the tank was empty and in his ignorance the driver feared that there would be an explosion of this compartment. Acting on impulse he drove the vehicle over the edge of the road and jumped off. The vehicle ran down a short declivity and turned over at the bottom. This unreasoning action on the part of the driver merely served to ensure that the contents of the storage compartments would be involved in the fire and nullified the object of the regulations relating to the construction of tank-wagons. Had the driver been properly instructed by his company he would have realized that his fears of an explosion were groundless and that the correct action to take would have been to have pulled off to the side of the road and let the fire in the cab take its course. The tank-wagon was of standard construction, and the steel plate separating the cab and the transport tank would probably have been effective in preventing the spread of the fire to the latter.

As usual, a number of small outbreaks of fire occurred during the refuelling of cars at petrol-pumps. Damage in all cases was of a minor nature, and no serious personal injuries were reported. The causes of the fires were found to be the common ones, such as smoking, failing to cut off the engine whilst refuelling, &c. Damage to buildings in these fires was negligible and illustrates that the Department's requirements as to the location of petrol-pumps afford reasonable protection against spread of such fires.

CINEMATOGRAPH FILMS ACT.

Licenses.—The following licenses were issued during the year ended 30th September, 1936 (corresponding figures for the previous year in parentheses): Exhibitors, 424, (410); circuit exhibitors, 38 (35); renters, 16 (14); storage, 13 (14); miscellaneous, 54 (34).

Accidents.—One fatal accident in connection with the handling of cinematograph film was reported during the year. It appears that the deceased was engaged in buying old film from the film exchanges and sending it to Germany for recovery of the silver in the emulsion. The film was packed in wooden cases lined with zinc, and a lid of similar material was soldered on top. The work was carried out in an old three-sided wood and iron shed. During the soldering of one case the film therein was ignited by heat from the electric soldering-iron used and the lid was blown off the case. The burst of flame which accompanied this set fire to some thousands of feet of film on a lorry in the shed, and so rapidly did the fire spread that the deceased had his clothes burnt off him before he could escape from the shed. As a consequence of the accident the Department took up with the film exchanges the question of disposal of disused film and obtained an assurance that such film would not be supplied to any person until the Department's approval had been obtained.

Four fires occurred during the projection of film, as against three for the preceding year. In all cases the amount of film destroyed was confined to that on a single spool, and this evidences that the precautions insisted upon by the Department are efficacious in preventing the spread of fire to the remainder of the programme in the projection-room. In two cases the ignition of the film was caused by contact with a stump of hot carbon removed from the arc lamp. Only carelessness on the part of the operators concerned can have been responsible for such a happening. In addition to the above outbreaks, a film fire also occurred during rewinding of film by an operator, but this took place after the performance at a time when the theatre was empty.