

The following overseas return, compiled from the latest information available from reliable sources, shows the motor-vehicle death-rates in relation to number of vehicles :—

Country.	Deaths per 10,000 Motor-vehicles.	Country.	Deaths per 10,000 Motor-vehicles.
Canada	10·5	Chile	31·4
Union of South Africa	11·2	Scotland	34·8
Denmark	12·5	Germany	42·4
Norway	12·8	Belgium	43·6
United States of America	13·0	Netherlands	51·1
Australia	16·8	Switzerland	49·1
Sweden	23·1	Ceylon	55·5
England and Wales	24·6	Italy	61·4
Irish Free State	26·0		

(Deaths from collisions of motor-vehicles with trains or street cars, and motor-cycle accidents, have been excluded, as these figures are not available for all countries.)

The latest figures for New Zealand (1937–38) show, on the same basis, a death-rate of 8·8 per 10,000 motor-vehicles. When all types of accidents are included the rate is 9·6.

While New Zealand holds the premier position with the lowest accident risk per vehicle of any of the “ motorized ” countries, traffic accidents in the Dominion last year exacted the heavy toll of 243 killed and 5,091 injured. In the last ten years the yearly fatalities have ranged from 135 to 247, the latter figure having been recorded in 1931.

The task—one which has been rendered more difficult by the heavy increase (30 per cent.) in the last two years in the number of motor-vehicles—is to so organize traffic that it may flow as freely and expeditiously as is permitted by the consideration of safety for all. Throughout the year the question has been further examined and studied from the aspects of engineering, education, and enforcement, and the measures adopted under those heads have been co-ordinated in an endeavour to secure the most effective results.

B. ROAD SAFETY COUNCIL.

The Minister and the Department continue to have the benefit of association in road-safety activities with the New Zealand Road Safety Council. During the year Miss M. Magill accepted membership on the Council, the present personnel being Hon. R. Semple, Mr. G. L. Laurenson, Miss M. Magill, Dr. G. E. Anson, Mr. J. F. Cousins, Mr. D. J. Cummings, Mr. J. S. Hawkes, Mr. J. H. Jerram, Mr. M. F. Luckie, Dr. J. W. McIlraith, Mr. W. A. O’Callaghan, Mr. D. C. Pryor, Mr. F. C. Spratt, Mr. C. G. Talbot, Mr. J. Wood.

During the year two meetings were held by the Council, at which full consideration was given to the various aspects of road safety. At the last meeting it was resolved that for the future the Council would meet at not less than three-monthly intervals. A proposal that the Council be formed into an executive rather than an advisory body was considered by the Council, which decided against the proposal.

The main problems considered by the Council were :

Accident-prone drivers and the possibility of having such drivers retested :

The high accident rate in the case of motor-cycles, taxi-cabs, and rental cars : the lighting of highways and the headlight problem :

The control of traffic and the necessity for adequate staff :

The education of children :

Adult propaganda and education :

The question of the drunken driver.

Other matters that were discussed covered pedestrian-crossings, traffic lights and signals, drivers’ license systems, first-aid equipment for private cars, use of horns, the “ keep to the left ” rule for drivers, and the marking of guiding-lines on roads.

Discussions at the Council meetings and the general exchange of views amongst the representatives of the various interests have been of the greatest value, while the recommendations made have given the Government many helpful suggestions in the extension of its road-safety policy and have assisted materially in bringing about a reduction in the accident rate.

C. ROAD-ACCIDENT STATISTICS.

During the year ended 31st March, 1938, as the result of 229 motor-vehicle accidents on the roads and streets of New Zealand, 243 persons lost their lives. There were, in addition, 3,833 other accidents where some personal injury was incurred, the total number of accidents thus numbering 4,062. As well as those killed there were 1,130 persons seriously injured and 3,961 others who suffered minor injuries.

As stated in last year’s annual report, a National Road Safety Council was set up in September, 1936, for the purpose of investigating the problem of road accidents and advising the Government, and a vigorous road-safety campaign has been conducted since that date.

Following recommendations by the Road Safety Council, arrangements were made with the Police Department for the reporting of all motor accidents involving any injury to person. The recording was commenced on 15th March, 1937, this date being selected in order to include the Easter period of last year. Prior to this date the only statistics available related to those accidents causing fatalities.