

1939.
NEW ZEALAND.

FIRE BRIGADES OF THE DOMINION

(REPORT ON THE) FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1939, BY THE
INSPECTOR OF FIRE BRIGADES.

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

THE INSPECTOR OF FIRE BRIGADES to the HON. THE MINISTER OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS.
Office of the Inspector of Fire Brigades,
Wellington, 11th September, 1939.

SIR,—
I have the honour to submit the thirty-first annual report for the year ended 31st March, 1939, on the working of the Fire Brigades Act, 1926.

FIRE DISTRICTS.

No new fire districts were created during the year, and the number in operation at the end of the year was fifty-five.

DOMINION FIRE WASTE.

The loss by fire in New Zealand during 1938, estimated on the same basis as in previous years—i.e., the amount paid out by insurance companies plus 12½ per cent. estimated uninsured loss—was £670,675, being an increase of £149,781 on the figures for the previous year. This increase is almost entirely accounted for by the large number and exceptional severity of serious fires occurring in fire districts shown in detail below. It would appear that the Dominion is experiencing a cycle of high-loss fires, since it will be noted that the sequence of these fires extends into 1939, the actual losses being £156,488 for the last nine months of 1938 and £145,662 for the first three months of 1939. For the purposes of comparative record the following table shows the fire losses in New Zealand, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States of America. An additional column has also been included to show the corresponding losses in fire districts which are recorded over a different annual period.

—	Fire Loss in New Zealand.		Fire Loss per Head.			
	Fire Districts, March, 1938–39.	Whole Dominion, Year 1938.	New Zealand.	Great Britain.	Canada.	United States of America.
	£	£	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.	s. d.
Average (1927–31)	508,406	1,332,032	18 1	5 0	17 5	16 0
1932	201,736	867,714	11 5	3 9	16 8	13 2
1933	245,195	644,781	8 4	4 7	12 11	8 10
1934	173,172	566,112	7 3	4 1	10 0	8 7
1935	181,296	607,410	7 9	4 0	8 9	8 1
1936	199,592	524,029	6 8	4 5	8 0	8 5
1937	170,167	520,894	6 6	4 9	8 4	8 1
1938	441,489	670,675	8 3	4 3	9 3	8 3

In view of the unusual number of large fires, no special significance can be attached to the increase in the fire loss for 1938. It is probable that, excluding this factor, the increase in the loss is proportionately less than the increase in replacement values of both buildings and contents. On the other hand, the unusually high loss in urban districts due to large fires, and the circumstances attending these fires, makes it desirable to call public attention firstly to the very unsatisfactory fire-exposure conditions existing in most blocks in the high-fire-risk areas in the cities, and secondly to the desirability of protecting high-value buildings by sprinkler or automatic alarm systems.