

MINING AND QUARRY ACCIDENTS

In metalliferous mines, at which 1,499 men were ordinarily employed, three persons were killed and two persons seriously injured.

At stone-quarries under the Stone-quarries Act, employing 1,551 men, three persons were killed and one person seriously injured.

In coal-mines, where 5,595 persons were ordinarily employed, twelve persons were killed and thirty-six persons seriously injured.

MINERALS OTHER THAN GOLD

While production of these minerals has generally been maintained at the same level as the preceding year, there have been no highlights in the progress and development of this section of the mining industry.

The supply position of essential war minerals as far as the Allied Nations are concerned has improved so far that substantial stock piles have now accumulated, and restrictions are being considered to prevent stock piles from becoming embarrassingly large. It is inevitable that such minerals as scheelite, mercury, manganese-ore, and mica, whose production in New Zealand has been fostered by war needs, must eventually be affected. As far as the Mines Department is concerned, the exploitation and development of these minerals will now have to be regarded from an economic viewpoint and not, as formerly, one of production at any cost to meet the necessities of war. On the other hand, industrial development in New Zealand in the post-war years should stimulate at least the exploration for, if not the actual development of, minerals used in industry, particularly non-metallic minerals.

Scheelite.—This year's production of tungsten-ores shows a substantial increase over that of the preceding year. Production of scheelite concentrates, calculated to the basis of 65 per cent. WO_3 per ton in the years in which purchase has come under Government control, has been as under:—

	Tons.				Tons.			
1940 79	1943 116
1941 71	1944 145
1942 71				

While New Zealand's production of scheelite is normally of small importance in the world's markets, its value during the war has been considerable, even though the amount is relatively insignificant.

With the commencement of 1945 a new agreement with the Imperial authorities came into force whereby all scheelite concentrates produced up till 30th June, 1945, were purchased at a price of 75s. sterling per unit, as compared with that of 100s. sterling per unit for the latter part of 1944 and 120s. sterling per unit for the two preceding years. The conditions were much the same as in previous agreements, except that a minimum value of 60 per cent. WO_3 was demanded and penalties exacted for various impurities were slightly increased.

Shortly before the date of expiration of this contract the Imperial authorities intimated that owing to the improved supply position of tungsten-ores they did not intend to purchase any scheelite after 30th June, 1945, but were confining their purchases to high-grade wolfram. However, they also stated that there appeared to be a market for scheelite in America through private channels and that they had no objection to New Zealand disposing of her output in that manner.

Accordingly, the sale of scheelite will now revert to the same conditions as existed prior to the outbreak of war. Negotiations have been proceeding for some time between producers and overseas buyers, and it is expected that satisfactory arrangements can be made for the disposal of scheelite produced in New Zealand.

At what price tungsten-ores will eventually be stabilized it is impossible to predict because of the many unknown factors, but some recession in the price seems inevitable.

At any rate, production this year has already dropped considerably, as many producers, having exhausted their ore, consider the position not sufficiently encouraging to undertake costly development work. The State scheelite-mines, which were responsible for one-third of the output last year, and whose production over the three years of their life amounts to one-fifth of the total production of New Zealand for the five war years, ceased operation at the end of the year due to the exhaustion of ore reserves. It has now been demonstrated that the scheelite deposits are generally shallow, small, and erratic, and lend themselves most suitably to small party operation. It is possible that operations of this nature may continue for some years unless the price level slumps drastically, but exhaustion of the deposits is in time inevitable and the basis of a steady mining industry of some magnitude unfortunately does not exist.

Mercury.—Operations were continued at Puhupuhi by Mercury Mines, Ltd., and a further 6,840 lb. of mercury were produced. The company has had to face considerable difficulties owing to unpleasant weather conditions resulting in much lost time, while the mining method adopted of opencast mining calls for modern earth-moving equipment, which has not been available.

Manganese-ore.—While no manganese-ore was actually produced in 1944, the shipment of 475 tons from Mirandite Products, Ltd.'s, property under lend-lease agreement was completed. The ore shipped proved to be high grade, but reserves at the mine are small. However, recent stripping of overburden by bulldozer has disclosed sufficient ore to make another shipment, this time to Australia, possible during this year.

Asbestos.—The efforts of the Hume Pipe Co., who have been developing the asbestos deposits in the Upper Takaka district, were mainly concerned during 1944 in carrying out an extensive development programme of driving adits and crosscutting therefrom. The material obtained from these workings was treated in the company's plant and information obtained thereby as to the percentage of fibre contained in the rock and the grade of the fibre. From these operations 17 tons of asbestos were recovered. Should this development programme result in the establishing of a sufficiently large tonnage of asbestos