

During the year five deaths resulted from accidents in New Zealand coal-mines, two being in the West Coast District and three in the Southern District.

In addition, thirty-nine accidents occurred involving fractures or other injuries of a more or less serious nature. Eight of these cases happened on the surface, three being at opencast coal-mines.

Of the fatalities in the West Coast District, one was an electrical and the other a haulage accident, while the three fatalities in the Southern District were due to falls of coal. Two of these occurred while working pillars in thick seams. This has been a fruitful source of fatal and serious accidents in the past, and the same methods are still being used. The death or permanent injury of many experienced miners has been caused by the working of the bord-and-pillar system in thick seams, and until this method is abandoned accidents from this cause will continue. Even with good inspection and the expert use of timber this class of accident cannot be avoided and the only remaining approach is to change the mining method.

Of the thirty-nine serious accidents the Northern District had eleven, the West Coast seventeen, and the Southern eleven. Falls of stone, coal, or timber caused two serious non-fatal accidents in the West Coast District and four in the Southern, besides the three fatalities due to this cause.

The Northern District, for the second year in succession maintained its record of no fatal accidents and no serious accidents due to falls. While there is no doubt some good fortune in this, and something is due to the nature of the mines, it is none the less an excellent result, and it is hoped that every one in the industry will work to provide a similar result in all districts.

In serious accidents during 1948 the emphasis is on haulage accidents. No less than twenty serious haulage accidents occurred, one causing a fatality.

Of the remainder the Northern District had seven, the West Coast ten, and the Southern two.

It is obvious on reading the accounts of the accidents that a large number could have been avoided by greater care. The attention of all concerned is directed to this, and to the need for good lighting, especially at control points on haulages, and of good equipment on self-acting inclines, with proper instruction and control of the men who work them.

IMPROVEMENTS IN MINE SAFETY

During the early part of the year, reports regarding the testing of coal-mine dusts by the Coal Survey Laboratory of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research emphasized the fact that the standard for combustibles laid down by regulations was in many cases too high for safety, and it was decided to reduce the permissible amount of combustibles in the case of ten mines to 30 per cent.

In carrying out these tests the actual potential danger of the dust sample was demonstrated by explosion in an apparatus designed in England for that purpose.

Four of these appliances have been ordered and are now on the way to New Zealand. It is proposed to make use of them for immediate tests as required, and they will be installed for that purpose at central points in the coal-mining districts.

A better supply of a good grade of stone-dust has been arranged for the West Coast District, and stone-dusting of these mines is now on a better footing. At two mines in the West Coast District, Wallsend and Dobson, the stone-dusting of the main roads is being carried out by compressed-air ejector. This has been found to give more efficient results for coverage, saves time and labour, and is economical in stonedust, which is hard to get and expensive. It is hoped that many more mines will follow the example of the Wallsend Mine, where the method was started, by using similar methods of distribution.

In all districts it is satisfactory to note that there is an increasing use of water sprays at inbye control points to wet the top of coal on its way to the surface. The effect on reducing the distribution of fine dust in haulage roads is considerable and adds largely to safety. Water sprays at the faces are also now generally used and have a good effect when used on the chains of coal-cutters or to wet fallen coal before loading.