

number necessary to take advantage of the operation of the Fire Brigades Act, the Minister granted the desired permission, and the visits were carried out accordingly. Advice, &c., has been given in the case of other of the smaller districts, on such matters as the purchasing of new plant, inspecting and reporting upon new appliances, &c., and an address on "Modern Methods of Fire Protection" was delivered before the delegates to the Annual Conference of the United Fire Brigades Association of New Zealand, held at Hastings in February last. During the Conference, representing 108 brigades, very strong evidence in favour of Fire Board control, including the benefit derived from the periodical visits of an inspecting officer, was given by a number of officers and men then working under the provisions of the Fire Brigades Act, and the following resolution was moved and carried unanimously: "That it be an instruction to the Executive to take steps whereby a knowledge of the working of the Fire Brigades Act may become better diffused, with a view to getting districts to see the advantage to be gained in working under a Fire Board."

In the course of my last inspections it was evident that in general a decided improvement has taken place in the discipline, drill, and methods as a whole, with the exception (although in some cases attention has been given to the matter) that more instruction and drill in rescue and ambulance work is required. In using the words "ambulance work" they should be understood as applying to that part of it that teaches the resuscitation of persons overcome by smoke, gas, heat, &c., the treating of burns, scalds, and those accidents common to fire-brigade work in general. In many cases a new spirit of emulation has arisen that is in part due to the members of the Fire Boards, in addition to providing better equipment, taking an active interest in the well-being of the *personnel* of the brigades.

Though much remains yet to be done, very considerable improvements have been and are being made by the majority of the Fire Boards in the equipment of their brigades and generally in the matter of fire protection in their respective districts. This has called for a proportionally large expenditure in comparison with that previously obtaining; but in the provision of stations, plant, appliances, &c., nothing is being expended except upon what is absolutely necessary to attain any degree of efficiency, which is a proof that until the coming into force of the Fire Brigades Act the requirements of the brigades had been very much neglected by at least some of the local governing bodies.

New central stations have been or are being built in the following fire districts—Oamaru, Milton, Dunedin, Palmerston North, Masterton, Feilding; with others at present under consideration. Motors of the latest designs for fire-brigade work have been purchased for Auckland, Christchurch, and Dunedin. Particular mention should be made of the most recent importation by the Christchurch Fire Board, of a 70-horse-power motor fitted with a turbine pump of 450 gallons capacity, the first of its class in Australasia. The results obtained from this machine after exhaustive trials exceeded all expectations. An engine of the same class, but with a pump of much larger capacity, is on order for Auckland. The foregoing are some of the principal improvements made; more information on this subject will be found in the attached reports.

About the usual average number of accidents to firemen, more or less severe, have occurred throughout the year, but I regret having to report that Fireman Williamson, of the Feilding Brigade, was accidentally killed in the execution of his duty during the progress of a fire in that town on the 5th October, 1909.

The insurance loss throughout the Dominion for the year ending 31st December, 1909, amounted to £468,530, or £51,050 in excess of the average loss for the previous five years. Adding 33½ per cent. to the insurance loss, for the purpose of arriving at the approximate fire waste for the year, brings the amount to £624,707, or £68,067 in excess of the average for the period previously mentioned. Taking the population of New Zealand proper as numbering one million, the average loss per head for 1909 was 12s. 6d., an increase of nearly 9½d. per capita. It is to be noted that the losses have been more generally distributed throughout the Dominion than in previous years—that is, no particular fire took place that involved a loss of any great magnitude, such, for instance, as that in Christchurch in 1908 approaching £300,000, which very greatly increased the average for the five years ending 31st December, 1908, the average fire waste for that period being £556,640, as against £624,707 for 1909.

The total number of fires throughout all the fire districts for the year ending 30th June last was 378, as compared with 330 for the previous year, an increase of 48.

The fire loss for the corresponding periods was £128,455, as against £77,750, an increase of £50,705.

A matter calling for comment is the number of fires that have been returned as due to incendiary and unknown causes. A comparison with the latest available returns from a number of other places will show that they are above normal proportions.

	Fires.	Incendiary.	Unknown.
Brisbane	36	...	13
South Australia	124	...	63
West Australia	138	...	63
Edinburgh	345	1	15
Melbourne	597	...	304
Sydney	633	2	40
London	3,238	2	291
New Zealand fire districts	378	30	189

And of the "unknown" 189 fires, 19 occurred in unoccupied premises. Some part of the more excessive disparities in the "unknown" causes may be due to the investigation into the causes being carried out in a more thorough or systematic manner in some places than is the practice in the Dominion.