

The principal improvements in equipment effected or in course of being carried out are as follows:—

New central station in Christchurch, which was officially opened on the 25th September, 1913. Commodious accommodation for all purposes is provided, and in addition to four sets of married officers' quarters in the main building six cottages for married firemen have been erected at the rear of the station, each having its own private yard and small garden attached.

A new central station is being erected in Timaru, and is now approaching completion.

Two new 40 h.p. motor hose tenders have been put in commission in Auckland, and one 20 h.p. motor hose tender in New Plymouth.

Fifteen circuits having 100 alarm boxes thereon have been added to the street fire-alarm installations. Three more automatic fire-alarm systems have been installed in Christchurch, and one more in Dunedin.

New motor fire appliances are on order—for Timaru, one 65 h.p. hose, ladder, and turbine pump machine; Masterton, one 60 h.p. hose, ladder, and reciprocating pump machine; Whangarei, one 50 h.p. hose, ladder, and first-aid pump machine; Christchurch, one 40 h.p. hose and turbine pump machine.

Considerable use is being made of the patterns recently imported by the Government for the benefit of the fire services in general, and a number of orders have been placed by brigades for the smaller appliances made in accordance therewith.

The total number of calls received by the brigades throughout the various fire districts was 777, as against 678 for the previous year, an increase of 99. As compared with 1912-13 there has been a decrease of 16 in the number of bush and grass fires—48 as against 64; but an increase under all other headings—viz., chimney fires, 70 (60), increase 10; out-of-district fires, 44 (30), increase 14; false alarms, 160 (127), increase 33; actual fires, 455 (397), increase 58. Of the 455 fires 13 are reported as due to incendiarism, 24 as having occurred on unoccupied premises, and 144 origin unknown. As in previous years, analysis of the reports show a number of cases of over or excessive insurance.

Losses throughout the Fire Districts.—The total fire loss for the year amounted to £84,367, comparing with the previous year as follows:—

	Insured.	Uninsured.	Totals.
	£	£	£
1912-13	102,661	18,993	121,654
1913-14	70,522	13,845	84,367
Decrease	32,139	5,148	37,287

Losses throughout the Dominion.—The insured loss throughout the Dominion for the year ended 31st December, 1913 (probably underestimated), was £484,462, and compares as follows:—

	£	£
Year ending 31/12/12	431,896	Average 9 years ending 31/12/12 426,332
Year ending 31/12/13	484,462	Loss year ending 31/12/13 484,462
Increase	£52,566	Increase £58,130

Following the same line of deduction as adopted in previous years, and adding 33½ per cent. to the insured loss so as to arrive at the approximate fire waste, the total loss for the year ended 31st December, 1913, is thus shown to be £645,949, an increase of £70,088 as compared with 1912, but an increase of £77,506 when compared with the average for the nine preceding years.

The losses quoted above for the fire districts and for the Dominion are each for twelve months respectively, but ending at different periods of the year; and the insured loss for the simultaneous twelve months ending 31st December, 1913, is—for the Dominion, £484,462; and for the fire districts, £96,949; or 20.01 per cent. of the total, with the inhabitants of the fire districts comprising 25 per cent. of the whole population of New Zealand, and with probably a very much higher percentage of insured property at risk.

The figures quoted under the heading "Losses throughout the Fire Districts" show a reduction in the fire loss for the year of £37,287 as compared with the previous year, and that notwithstanding there are twenty-two fire districts as against only twenty in 1912-13, also an increase of fifty-eight in the number of fires. The average loss per fire is considerably lower than in any previous year since the establishment of the Fire Board system of control. In my annual report for 1912-13, when commenting upon the very large decrease (£95,384) in the loss for the year throughout the fire districts as compared with that for 1911-12, and in face of a considerable increase in the number of fires, I state, "Although a large portion of the reduction is no doubt due to fortunate circumstances, a fair percentage thereof must certainly be set down to improved equipment, greater efficiency, and a better knowledge of fire-extinction work now prevalent amongst the officers and members of the brigades." I consider the results for 1913-14 are further proof that the greater all-round efficiency is producing a very tangible return, as also is the fact that the highest ratio of loss has occurred in those districts wherein the equipment generally has not been brought up to any efficient standard, and the results of the last two years' working should be gratifying to those Fire Boards who have gone to the expense of properly equipping their brigades. But it must be remembered there is all the time present the danger of the "late call," one of the worst, if not absolutely the worst feature in connection with fire-brigade work, and particularly dangerous when occurring in the case of outbreaks in large warehouses, department stores, &c.; for then, no matter how efficient the brigade and its equipment may be, too often the result is a disastrous fire with heavy losses, wiping out for years the average of good work performed by the brigade.