

in the rest of the Dominion ; and, secondly, that there are a considerable number of districts protected by fire brigades not controlled by Fire Boards, and these districts probably cover 40 per cent. of the property insured in the rest of the Dominion.

	Insurance Premiums.	Insurance Companies' Payments.				Percentages of Total Payments to Premium Income.
		Fire Board Levies.	Percentage of Premium Income.	Payments in respect of Fire Loss.	Percentage of Premium Income.	
	£	£		£		
Fire Districts : Six-year average ..	937,692	68,469	7.30	277,368	29.58	36.88
Rest of Dominion : Six-year average ..	873,981	..	..	480,677	55.00	55.00
Fire Districts : Three-year average ..	910,424	68,039	7.47	189,084	20.77	28.24
Rest of Dominion : Three-year average ..	746,361	..	..	349,673	46.85	46.85

An increase in Fire Board expenditure during the coming year is inevitable owing to the general rise in prices due to the return of more prosperous times, and the increased labour cost resulting from the recent legislation. It is therefore important that this increase should not be allowed to prejudice the position. It is submitted that the figures quoted above clearly establish justification not only for the existing basis of expenditure, but for an increase sufficient to bring the fire-protection service up to a higher standard of efficiency.

#### BRIGADE OFFICERS.

One of the principal difficulties under the existing system of administration is that of the training of officers, particularly for the permanent brigades and the larger towns, where a high standard both of administrative ability and technical knowledge is required. There are, for instance, in the secondary brigades a number of young firemen who are promising material for the future officers of the service, but their opportunities are limited by the fact that they are unable to obtain the experience which is essential for command at major fires. An interchange of officers is most desirable, and also the training of all permanent officers at least for a period, in one or other of the city brigades, where they can obtain the necessary experience both in brigade organization and in the actual work at fires. It is difficult to arrange for any interchange of officers under the existing system of independent Boards and in most cases officers are appointed from within the ranks of the individual brigade.

#### FIRE BRIGADE CONTROL.

In view of the consideration which is at present being given to the reduction in the number of local authorities operating in New Zealand, attention is directed to the suggestion contained in my annual report for 1933, advocating the formation of a Dominion Board to replace the existing system of district Fire Boards. This type of control is in existence in most of the Australian States, and offers definite advantages from the point of view of both efficiency and economy. There would appear to be no reason why the detailed administration of the service, at any rate in the smaller towns, could not be carried out by the municipality. The insurance interests would be safeguarded by representation on the Dominion Board, which would have control of financial matters.

#### CAUSES OF FIRE.

The causes of fires are set out in Table I attached to this report, which gives particulars for all fire districts for the current year, and average statistics for five years for the seven principal cities. It will be noted that there is very little variation in the proportionate number of fires arising from any particular cause, the most notable variation during the current year being the number of fires caused by sparks from fireplaces. There appears to have been something of an epidemic of fires in wash-houses arising principally from the storage in the vicinity of the copper of rubbish ready for burning, or the use of firing which is too long for the fire-box.

The figures of average loss per fire given at the bottom of the table are interesting in showing that the brigades are successful in keeping the losses, particularly in dwelling fires, to a very low average. It should be noted that the fires covered in this table are only those which reach such proportions as to require the attendance of the brigade, and represent only about one-fourth of the total number of outbreaks which occur in fire districts. Even under these circumstances the loss was less than £100 in the case 74.2 per cent. of the dwelling fires for the past three years, and in only 7.6 per cent. did the loss exceed £500. The loss in unoccupied dwellings continued to be considerably above the average.

#### INCENDIARISM.

The number of fires of suspicious origin was considerably below average. The improvement which has taken place in the speed of turnout in most brigades during the past few years has resulted in a larger proportion of these fires being detected, but the improvement shown is probably due in the main to the excellent work carried out by the police in their investigations into fires, and the publicity given to these investigations during the annual Fire-prevention Week. As indicated above, it is essential that, with the improvement of conditions now taking place, there should be no relaxation of the close