

Saving Electricity in the Home

AS the greatest consumption of electricity in New Zealand occurs in the household, the largest saving of electrical power can be made by domestic users. In this article Dorothy Johnson, Rural Sociologist, Department of Agriculture, Christchurch, discusses economies which can be effected by the housewife and how consumption can be regulated by reading the electric meter every few days.

IT has been truly said that all domestic progress will take an electrically lit path. Electricity came first as a new source of lighting in the home, superseding oil, gas, and candles. In efficiency and in the saving of labour its use marked a great advance. But there is a world of difference between a house that is lit by electricity and the home that is run by electricity. Its full use affects even the foundation design of the house. A comparison between a modern house built to be run by electricity and any of the 19th or early 20th century houses that are in use today shows that electricity is not just a fuel capable of providing light and warmth without the dirt and drudgery associated with oil lamps and the making and clearing away of solid fuel fires, but is also a force, a form of energy that can be used to replace human energy in a multitude of household tasks.



[National Publicity Studios photo.]

Where electric energy is used with intelligence in the home, comfort and efficiency are achieved with the minimum expenditure of human energy, and the housewife has more time to devote to the art of homemaking in its subtler and less tangible aspects and to play a part in the welfare of the community in which she lives.

However, this electrically lit path of domestic progress does not seem to

be a smooth one. To homes that are geared to the electrical standard of living there come for various reasons periods of restricted supply, necessitating the reduced use of some form of apparatus and a reorganisation at some inconvenience of the carefully planned work routines of the home specially devised by country women to fit in with the work of the farm. The crises in electrical supply in New Zealand are due to a natural cause—insufficient rainfall to fill the lakes the water of which is harnessed to provide the electrical energy. This affects the North and South Islands at different times. However, work is proceeding to increase the number and size of the hydro-electric generating plants so that ultimately the supply will meet all possible needs.

The graph on page 183 shows that the household is the greatest consumer of electricity. Over the 5 years shown well over half of the electricity used was taken by the consumer in the home. Of total electricity used in 1942 little less than 52 per cent, was taken by the domestic consumer, but by 1949 this proportion had risen to just more than 57 per cent. Therefore it is the domestic users who need to contribute the most to the saving of electrical power. The graph clearly indicates that of the total used in the home a little less than half was used by water heaters, which must be the greatest single use in which economies can be made.

Right Use of Electrical Power

The housewife has to be prepared for periods of power economy, some more stringent than others, which modify the enjoyment of the full electrical standard of life. Therefore, it would be an advantage to look more closely at the purposes for which electricity is used in the home. In England this need has been felt to be of sufficient importance to warrant the formation and action of an Electrical



[National Publicity Studios photo.]

Lifting heavy iron pots and kettles and lighting and tending an open fire made hard physical labour of daily household chores for pioneer women. A modern housewife who has the benefits of electricity turns a switch to obtain hot water or ice cubes, to cook a meal, or to clean the house, and she may listen to the radio for entertainment as she works. The electrically powered kitchen in the illustration at the top of this page contrasts sharply with this pioneer kitchen.