

It is a noteworthy feature that the adoption of mechanical methods for the ventilation of underground workings is becoming very general at the more important collieries throughout the colony. By this means air-currents of greatly increased volume are maintained, and the atmosphere of the mines so ventilated compares more than favourably with that of many factories and other establishments.

NEW ZEALAND STATE COAL-MINES.

The colliery at Seddonville commenced to put out coal towards the end of the year; and at Point Elizabeth Colliery the varied works of railway and tramway construction, erection of surface plant, buildings, &c., likewise the completion of the tunnels to win the coal, have been vigorously pushed forward. Both collieries are now producing coal suitable for steaming purposes, that from Point Elizabeth Colliery being also a first-class article for household use. Further details will be found in the report of the manager of the State Coal-mines.

ACCIDENTS IN MINES.

I regret to have to record that last year the number of fatalities in connection with mining operations was greater than has been the case for each of the three years previous. With a continually increasing mineral output a substantial decrease in the number and extent of accidents was experienced during the years 1900, 1901, and 1902, as compared with a similar number of years preceding, which is satisfactory as showing the care exercised in the supervision of mines. In carrying out the many and varied classes of work under conditions quite different from those which obtain in surface occupations, there are many and extraordinary difficulties to contend with, and operations have frequently to be conducted where danger naturally exists. Familiarity with danger often engenders contempt for it, and workmen are apt to get careless, and to regard measures promoted for their safety with indifference.

The fatalities for the year were as follows:—

Class of Mining.	Number of Persons employed.	Fatalities.	Rate per 1,000.
Gold-mining—			
Quartz-mines	3,597	9	2·5
Hydraulic and alluvial mines	6,613	4	1·5
Dredges	6	6	
Coal-mines	2,852	4*	1·4
	13,062	23	1·76

* Two other fatalities occurred on coal-mine properties, but not in connection with actual mining-work.

Each of the foregoing accidents was inquired into by, or on behalf of, the Department, and, as the result of one accident, by which two persons were killed, a prosecution against the manager of the mine was subsequently instituted.

KAURI-GUM.

Kauri-gum to the amount of 9,357 tons, having a value of £631,102, was exported during the year. This shows an increase of 1,927 tons, representing a value of £180,879, in comparison with the exports for the year 1902. The average value was £67 8s. 11½d. per ton, or £6 19s. 0½d. per ton in excess of that of the previous year.

SCHEELITE.

So far this mineral, which occurs in connection with quartz-reefs in portions of Marlborough and Otago, has only been treated commercially to a limited extent. Messrs. Donaldson Bros., of Macrae's, Otago, have appliances at their battery for separating scheelite from the quartz sands, and are at present the only people in the colony who prepare this mineral for the market. Owing to inquiries for the supply of scheelite in larger quantities than are now available, attention is being directed to the question by other parties interested in quartz-mines in those localities where the mineral is known to exist.