

It is pleasing to note that there has been an increase of 48,724 tons in the production of coal during the year. The increase in bituminous and brown coals is 84,806 tons, while lignite has declined 36,082 tons. Importations, 85 per cent. of which came from Australia, decreased by 320,981 tons.

INVESTIGATIONS, NEW ZEALAND COALS.

The brown-coal and lignite mines of the Dominion are seriously handicapped in their operations by the difficulty experienced in marketing the small coal which results from screening for household purposes. The effect is that the small coal, if disposed of, is sold at prices below the cost of production, and this loss has to be made up from the sale of the screened coal, thus increasing very seriously the cost to the consumer of household coal. This is a matter to which I and my officers have paid considerable attention during the year with a view to investigating the possibilities of increasing the market for small coal. If low-temperature carbonization or briquetting were commercially practicable the present difficulty would be overcome. To ascertain definitely the possibilities, an investigation is being undertaken by the Dominion Analyst, the necessary plant for conducting the tests having recently been procured from England by the Mines Department for that purpose. In addition, two representative samples of coal from the Waikato, and two from Otago and Southland, have been forwarded for test purposes to Professor W. A. Bone, of the Imperial College of Science, London, the recognized authority in the Empire on the low-temperature carbonization of coal. When the results of the tests come to hand it will afford me great pleasure to bring the same under the notice of honourable members.

Another matter upon which the coal-mining industry and the Department constantly felt the want of reliable information was the relative inflammability of New Zealand coals, the resulting liability to coal-dust explosions in our mines, and the amount of stone-dusting required to render them safe from this danger. It was quite impracticable to carry out tests on a sufficiently large scale in New Zealand, but I am pleased to say that arrangements are now being made for the necessary tests to be conducted by the British Mines Department at their Eskmeals experimental station. In all, seven samples of 10 tons each are being sent—two from Otago and Southland, three from Grey and Buller, and two from the Waikato. These samples are fairly representative of the coals of New Zealand. I anticipate that the results of the tests will give the Government the necessary information and data upon which to base amending legislation designed with a view to rendering the mines of this country more safe against the danger of coal-dust explosions.

PERSONS EMPLOYED IN OR ABOUT MINES AND STONE-QUARRIES.

The following table shows the number of persons employed in each inspection district during 1922 and 1921 :—

Classification.	Inspection District.			Totals.		
	Northern (North Island).	West Coast (of South Island).	Southern (rest of South Island).	1922.	1921.	Increase.
Gold, silver, and tungsten ore	1,103	540	388	2,031	2,021	10
Ironstone, cinnabar, and asbestos	18	42	..	60	49	11
Coal	1,242	2,207	1,107	4,556	4,367	189
Stone-quarries under the Stone- quarries Act	934	55	394	1,383	1,561	178*
Totals	3,297	2,844	1,889	8,030	7,998	32†

* Decrease.

† Net increase.

MINING AND QUARRY ACCIDENTS.

At metalliferous mines, at which 2,091 persons were ordinarily employed, one life was lost by accident, and one other person received serious injuries.

At stone-quarries under the Stone-quarries Act, in which 1,383 persons were ordinarily employed, two persons were accidentally killed, and four others received serious injuries.