

## FIRE - ESCAPES.

The circumstances of the fires in the hotels in Greymouth and Wellington referred to above were practically identical. The fire broke out in the kitchen or one of the living-rooms on the ground floor and spread with great rapidity up the staircase and along the passages on the upper floor, so as to block all the interior exits. Similar conditions were experienced at hotel fires at Helensville and Oreti, where the occupants of the buildings had narrow escapes, and in a nurses' home in Wellington, where a number of nurses were injured in escaping from the windows of the upper floor. These fires emphasize the necessity for the provision of fixed external fire-exits, accessible from every room, in all buildings where any considerable number of persons are accommodated, and particularly in buildings of wooden interior construction.

## FIRE - PREVENTION.

For a number of years past attention has been called in these reports to the disastrous fire waste which takes place every year in New Zealand. It has on several occasions been suggested that definite measures should be taken to check this economic loss, which it will be seen from the figures quoted above has, if anything, an increasing tendency. Similar suggestions have been made by the leading Fire Brigade Superintendents and by the United Fire Brigades' Association at its annual conferences. Attention has also been drawn to the results achieved by fire-prevention work in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada. The figures quoted above show that this work has resulted in a very definite decrease in the national fire losses, and, particularly in the United States, this decrease has been consistently maintained for the last five-year period.

The efforts in this direction in America have been directed mainly by the National Fire Protection Association, the members of which are national institutes, societies, and associations interested in the protection of life and property from loss by fire. This body has organized a "fire-prevention week" throughout the United States of America and Canada, and also maintains an inspection service which is placed at the disposal of individual cities on request. The result has been to decrease the fire loss in particular areas by as much as three-fourths, and this decrease is reflected in the national figures.

In a country the size of New Zealand a similar organization would probably not be practicable, particularly in view of the public apathy on the question and the proportionate expense involved. If anything is to be done, it is therefore necessary that the Government should take the initiative, and a start was made last year by the inauguration of a "fire-prevention week." It is gratifying to be able to record that the action of the Department was very favourably received by the press, and generally by local authorities, while the fire brigades both individually and through their association co-operated with considerable enthusiasm.

The measures adopted consisted of the circulation to all business premises of a pamphlet setting out the facts regarding the national fire waste, and the principal causes of fire and methods of protection. An inspection card was also distributed to show how individual occupiers could determine and correct any fire hazards existing in the building. An inspection and "clean up" programme, with special rubbish-collections, was arranged by most of the local authorities. Practically all the fire brigades held local demonstrations to interest the public in the work. In many cases lectures were given in the schools by fire-brigade officers, and a special effort was made to arrange for lessons being given by the teachers in every school. Addresses on fire-prevention were also given from the principal radio broadcasting stations.

The teaching of fire-prevention in schools is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in the success of fire-prevention work. Children are naturally receptive, and, the lessons being to some extent novel and outside of ordinary school-work, are very effective, and will undoubtedly result in the training of future citizens who have some realization of the necessity for greater care with respect to fire. The value of the teaching was well illustrated in an incident which occurred in the North Auckland district shortly after the lessons had been given. A fire broke out in a farmhouse, which was occupied at the time by three children, the eldest a boy of nine. The parents were absent at the milking-shed, which was about a quarter of a mile away. The eldest child took the two younger ones outside and then ran down to call his parents. He subsequently explained that this was what he had been told to do by his teacher.

It is not to be expected that very definite results would follow a single fire-prevention effort of this kind. The "week" was held late in the year, and it would, in any case, not have much effect on the national figures, although it might to some extent be reflected in the reduction of fire-district losses, the returns for which cover the year ending 31st March. It is strongly recommended that the "week" be made an annual event. The date selected—November—clashed to some extent with the election campaign and also with the school examinations, and it is suggested that in future a date about the end of February be adopted.

## LEGISLATION.

Provision was made in section 43 of the Local Legislation Act, 1931, to authorize an agreement between the Auckland and Newmarket Fire Boards under which the Auckland Board undertook the fire protection of the Newmarket Fire District.

The present provisions of the Fire Brigades Act with respect to the formation of united fire districts are somewhat cumbersome and have not been operated under since they were first enacted in 1914. In the case of the Newmarket district, while it was generally recognized that it would be in the