

FIRE-PREVENTION.

The results achieved by the fire-prevention week held at the end of 1931 amply demonstrated the value of a fire-prevention campaign in assisting to reduce the national fire loss. It is well known that publicity efforts of this character are not effective unless repeated at fairly regular intervals, and arrangements were therefore made to hold a fire-prevention week in April last. As on the previous occasion, the local authorities and Fire Boards were asked to assist, and publicity matter was prepared for general circulation.

The undoubted success of the movement was due mainly to the enthusiasm with which the organization was taken up by the fire brigades throughout the country. In the city and most of the larger towns a small grant was made by the brigade controlling authority to cover the cost of signs, &c., and the demonstrations given by the brigades to arouse public interest were very creditable. Processions and special displays were held in the cities, and in even the smallest of the country towns the brigades arranged for special exhibitions of their work. Arrangements were made for members of the brigade to give lessons in the local schools, and the firemen also undertook the distribution of the publicity matter.

Broadcast talks were given from the Y.A. stations, and the press throughout New Zealand gave the question considerable prominence. The references noted included twenty editorials, sixty-nine news items regarding fire-brigade displays, eighteen illustrations, and seventy-two general news references and articles on fire hazards and fire-prevention. The country papers in particular dealt at considerable length with the more prominent fire hazards, and this publicity is particularly valuable, as it would get the information into many country homes which would not otherwise be reached by the campaign.

CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS.

The Government has decided not to proceed with the proposed Building Construction Bill, which has been the subject of reference in the last two annual reports. This is regretted, as it was hoped that under this Bill it would be possible to arrange for standard building by-laws providing for the protection of buildings, particularly from fire-exposure hazards.

A typical illustration of loss arising from the neglect of this precaution was a recent fire in a two-storey building of wooden construction in Wellington. In this case the fire broke out in a lavatory adjoining a small light area, on the opposite side of which was a reinforced concrete building of three storeys. The brigade received an early call and comparative little fire damage was done in the wooden building. The windows in the light area in the concrete building were of ordinary glass in wooden frames, the fire broke through immediately, and the fire damage was practically as extensive as that in the building in which the outbreak occurred.

It is understood that in lieu of the proposed legislation it is proposed to issue a set of model building by-laws for use by local authorities, prepared with special reference to earthquake-resisting design. Although this is not at first apparent, the question of fire resistance in the construction of buildings has an important bearing on earthquake damage, since a properly constructed building will lessen the danger of block fires following earthquake. This danger exists generally in most New Zealand cities and towns at the present time, since very few of the buildings—even those constructed during recent years—are adequately protected against exposure fires.

Very little attention appears to have been paid by architects to the safeguarding of buildings against fire, and very few of the local authorities' by-laws contain provisions requiring these safeguards. In his first report to the Government after his appointment as Inspector of Fire Brigades, the late Captain T. T. Hugo referred to this question as follows:—

“Faulty Building Construction.”—This is a widely spread evil. Fires have taken place in our midst that should have been looked upon as valuable lessons, but very little good has resulted in that direction. A large block of buildings recently erected in one of our cities in place of those destroyed by fire is, as a conflagration risk, very little, if any, better than it was before—owing to unprotected windows in narrow rights-of-way, vulnerable roofs, &c. A striking illustration of false economy in these respects was shown during the progress of the fire that took place on Lambton Quay in October, 1906. Had the side-windows and roof of the then newly erected Bank of New South Wales been protected—and this could have been done for a comparatively small increase in the cost of erection—this fine building would most undoubtedly not have been destroyed.”

It is regrettable that, despite the great improvement in methods and materials that are available to the modern builder, it should be necessary to call attention to this matter in practically the same terms twenty-six years later.

METROPOLITAN FIRE DISTRICTS.

The operations of the Auckland Metropolitan Fire Board, which functioned for the first time during the year under review, amply demonstrated the advantages of unified control of a large urban area, both from the point of view of brigade efficiency and financial savings.

During the year reports were prepared with respect to the formation of similar metropolitan fire districts in Christchurch and Dunedin in lieu of the present arrangement under which the Fire Board provides protection for the surrounding districts on payment of a retaining fee. The Christchurch authorities have declined to support the proposals in the meantime, but application has been received for the formation of a united district comprising the City of Dunedin and the Borough of Mosgiel, and negotiations are still being carried on for the inclusion of the Boroughs of St. Kilda and Green Island.

FIRE-BRIGADE CONTROL IN FIRE DISTRICTS.

No further progress has been made with the suggestion contained in the last annual report that, in lieu of the present fifty-four Fire Boards, the fire service throughout the fire districts should be controlled by a New Zealand Board operating through the local authorities in the country towns. The matter was given some consideration at the last meeting of the Municipal Association, when a remit