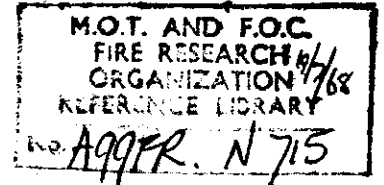


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Fire Research Note

No. 715



FIRE DEATHS IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1968

by

S. E. CHANDLER

June 1968

FIRE
RESEARCH
STATION

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MINISTRY OF TECHNOLOGY AND FIRE OFFICES' COMMITTEE
JOINT FIRE RESEARCH ORGANIZATION

11/5/68

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INTRODUCTION

There was a disturbing number of deaths in fires in the first quarter of 1968. Based on reports received, there were 285 deaths in 216 fires. Multiple fatality fires numbered 31, as many as in the first three months of 1963, which was a particularly bad period.

The worst incident this quarter was the fire at the Shelton Mental Hospital, which accounted for the lives of 24 females, many of them elderly or sub-normal. Another bad fire involved some flatlets in London, accounting for 5 deaths. The 216 fires also involved 110 non-fatal casualties, 116 rescues (including over 40 at Shelton Hospital), 47 escapes. In one incident, 66 pupils of a boarding school were evacuated.

Tables 1 - 4 inclusive, give further details of these fires. As Table 1 shows the great majority of fires involving deaths occur in dwellings, multiple death fires being most common in terraced houses and buildings converted into flats. Table 2 gives details of the time of call to the fires. Smoking materials and various forms of space heating are prominent causes. Young children and old people account for 61 per cent of the deaths and were often alone when the incidents occurred.

Although the winter months usually account for a high proportion of fire deaths, if the trend which has been set this quarter continues, the death roll in fires attended by fire brigades this year could well approach 900.

FIRE DEATHS IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 1968 (PROVISIONAL FIGURES)

Table 1: Hazard in which fires occurred

Hazard in which fire started	No. of fires	No. of deaths
IN BUILDINGS		
Industry	6	7
Financial, professional and miscellaneous services	6	6
Medical services	1	24
Clubs, hotels, restaurants and public houses	2	3
Houses - detached or semi-detached	32	34
- terraced	31	45
- not stated	54	61
Flats - in block	27	27
- converted	31	47
- other or not stated	12	14
Non-institutional dwellings as part of other occupancies	2	2
Other buildings	3	4
Total	207	274
NOT IN BUILDINGS		
Vehicles	4	6
Caravans	3	3
Other outdoor hazards	2	2
Total	9	11
T O T A L	216	285

Table 2: Time of call to fires

Time of call to fires	No. of fires	No. of deaths
Midnight - 2.59 a.m.	27	58
3.00 - 5.59 a.m.	23	29
6.00 - 8.59 a.m.	19	19
9.00 - 11.59 a.m.	36	43
Midday - 2.59 p.m.	33	36
3.00 - 5.59 p.m.	31	43
6.00 - 8.59 p.m.	22	26
9.00 - 11.59 p.m.	23	29
Not called (late call)	2	2
T O T A L	216	285

Table 3: Sources of ignition of fires

Source of ignition of fire	No. of fires	No. of deaths
Children with fire	8	13
Matches, tapers, naked lights, etc.	8	9
Smoking materials	37	65
Crash or collision	4	6
Electric - space heating	13	13
- blanket	3	3
- other	7	7
Gas - cooking	3	3
- space heating	8	9
- other	1	1
Solid fuel - fire in grate	31	41
- other	3	3
Oil - space heating	16	22
- other	2	2
Other known causes	10	10
Unknown*	62	78
T O T A L	216	285

* Includes fires reported as "Unknown, pending inquest"

Table 4: Age and sex of casualties

Age (years)	Male	Female
Under 1	6	7
1- 5	25	21
6-15	6	6
16-40	23	12
41-65	24	40
66-80	21	55
Over 80	15	24
T O T A L	120	165

