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FIRE DEATHS IN 1968

by

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February 1969

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SUMMARY

A preliminary survey of fatal fires in 1968 shows that in reports received by 10th February 1969 there have been 628 fatal fires of which 89 have resulted in more than one death. There were 809 deaths in these incidents, only nine less than the previous highest annual total of 818 (in 1963).

The two most serious incidents in the last quarter of the year were at a hotel in Brighton involving seven deaths and, on the following day, a fire in a Glasgow furniture warehouse in which 22 people died. Other serious incidents in the earlier part of the year included a mental hospital (24 deaths), a Boeing 707 (5 deaths), collapse of a block of high flats after an explosion (4 deaths) and several incidents in multiple occupancy dwellings and hotels. Five firemen died through injuries received whilst fighting fires.

KEY WORDS: Fatalities, fire statistics.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is the fourth in a series of quarterly reports giving preliminary information on deaths in fires attended by fire brigades. The information it contains is based on reports of fires attended by fire brigades which have been received by 10th February 1969 and is subject to revision when all reports have been received.

In 1968, 809 people lost their lives through fire, the highest annual total so far recorded except for 1963, when 818 deaths were reported in a year that was noted for its very severe winter. It is highly likely that the 1963 figure will be exceeded by the time all reports have been received.

Within two days, 29 people were killed in two fires alone, 7 in a fire in an hotel in Brighton and 22 in one in a Glasgow furniture factory and warehouse.

Although the number of fatal fires does not appear to have increased during the year, there has been a disturbing increase in the numbers which caused multiple deaths. These have risen from 35 in 1960¹ to a provisional total of 89 in 1968.

Tables 1-4 give further information on the fire deaths in 1968. In Table 1 it can be seen that 185, or nearly one-third of the fatal fires in buildings, occurred in terraced buildings and houses that had been converted into flats. Allowing for the proportion of fires in which the type of house was not stated, it is quite possible that this fraction could, in fact, be of the order of 40 per cent. It can also be seen that multiple death fires form a higher proportion of the fatal fires in terraced property than in other types of houses (19.8 per cent in comparison with 6.6 per cent).

Table 2 gives details of the time of the call to the fire brigade. It can be seen that the worst period of the day in respect of multiple death fires is the mid-morning period, 0900 to 1200. Some of these incidents occurred when children who were left alone played with fire. Some of the industrial fires also happened in this period, including that in the Glasgow furniture factory.

Table 3 shows that the most common known cause of fatal fires is 'smoking materials', accounting for over a quarter of the fires of known cause. Space heating, notably oil and solid fuel, account for large proportions of fatal fires. In multiple death fires, however, children with fire shows up as an important cause and emphasises the danger of leaving children unattended, even for a short time.

Table 4 shows the age and sex distribution of the fatal casualties, which does not seem to have changed from previous reports². Five firemen were killed during the year.

Table 5 is an addition to the tables in previous reports² and gives details of the numbers of deaths in each fire brigade area.

REFERENCES

1. CHANDLER, S. E. A survey of multiple fatality incidents 1960-1966. Ministry of Technology and Fire Offices' Committee Joint Fire Research Organization Fire Research Note No.703/1968.
2. CHANDLER, S. E. Fire deaths in the first nine months of 1968. Ministry of Technology and Fire Offices' Committee Joint Fire Research Organization Fire Research Note No.734/1968.

FIRE DEATHS IN 1968
(Provisional figures)

Table 1

Hazard in which fires started

Hazard in which fire started	No. of fatal fires	No. of multiple death fires	No. of deaths
IN BUILDINGS			
Industry	19	4	44
Distributive trades	4	1	8
Financial, professional and miscellaneous services	8	1	9
Medical services	5	1	28
Clubs, hotels, restaurants and public houses	16	5	31
Houses - detached or semi-detached	76	5	83
- terraced	106	21	139
- not stated	149	14	168
Flats - in blocks	52	7	62
- converted	79	13	101
- other or not stated	34	3	39
Non-institutional dwellings as part of other occupancies	8	-	8
Private sheds, garages, etc.	8	-	8
Other	7	2	9
Total	571	77	737
NOT IN BUILDINGS			
Road vehicles	24	6	30
Other means of transport	8	4	15
Caravans	10	-	10
Other	15	2	17
Total	57	12	72
TOTAL	628	89	809

Table 2

Time of call to fires

Time of call to fires	No. of fatal fires	No. of multiple death fires	No. of deaths
Midnight - 0259	77	13	121
0300 - 0559	72	11	95
0600 - 0859	69	10	80
0900 - 1159	123	20	168
1200 - 1459	82	6	89
1500 - 1759	85	16	115
1800 - 2059	54	5	60
2100 - 2359	61	8	76
Not stated or not called	5	-	5
TOTAL	628	89	809

Table 3

Source of ignition of fires

Source of ignition of fire	No. of fatal fires	No. of multiple death fires	No. of deaths
Children with fire	26	11	43
Crash or collision	19	5	24
Malicious ignition	19	1	25
Matches, taper, naked lights, etc.	21	3	24
Smoking materials	128	11	170
Electric - space heating	37	2	39
- wire and cable	14	2	19
- blanket	16	1	17
- other	10	1	11
Gas - cooking	11	1	14
- space heating	22	1	23
- other	4	-	4
Solid fuel - fire in grate	71	7	84
- other	7	-	7
Oil - space heating	39	6	48
- other	8	2	10
Other	19	1	20
Unknown*	157	34	227
TOTAL	628	89	809

*Includes fires reported as 'Unknown, pending inquest'

Table 4

Age and sex of fatal casualties

Age (years)	Male	Female
Under 1	18	14
1 - 5	67	43
6 - 15	22	12
16 - 40	91*	50
41 - 65	99**	97
66 - 80	74	111
Over 80	37	56
Not stated	10	8
TOTAL	418	391

*Includes three fire brigade personnel

**Includes two fire brigade personnel

Table 5

Numbers of deaths in each fire brigade area

(A) English and Welsh County Borough Fire Brigades

Brigade	No. of deaths	Brigade	No. of deaths	Brigade	No. of deaths
Barnsley	1	Grimsby	1	Rochdale	2
Birkenhead	5	Halifax	1	Rotherham	1
Birmingham	18	Hartlepool	1	St. Helens	1
Blackburn	1	Hastings	1	Sheffield	8
Blackpool	4	Huddersfield	4	Southampton	1
Bolton	6	Kingston upon Hull	7	Southend	3
Bournemouth	1	Leeds	6	Southport	3
Bradford	12	Leicester	5	South Shields	3
Brighton	13	Liverpool	7	Stoke on Trent	1
Bristol	2	Luton	1	Sunderland	3
Burnley	1	Manchester	17	Swansea	2
Burton upon Trent	1	Merthyr Tydfil	7	Tees-side (from	2
Bury	3	Middlesbrough (until	1	1.4.68)	
Cardiff	4	31.3.68 only)		Wakefield	1
Chester	1	Newcastle and	7	Wallasey	1
Coventry	3	Gateshead		Walsall	3
Derby	4	Newport (Mon.)	1	Warley	1
Dewsbury	1	Northampton	2	Warrington	1
Doncaster	3	Nottingham	16	West Bromwich	1
Dudley	5	Oldham	2	Wigan	1
Eastbourne	1	Plymouth	1	Wolverhampton	5
Exeter	1	Portsmouth	1	York	2
Gloucester	6	Preston	2		

Table 5 (cont'd)

(B) English and Welsh County Fire Brigades

Brigade	No. of deaths	Brigade	No. of deaths	Brigade	No. of deaths
Bedfordshire	6	Glamorgan	8	Pembrokeshire	2
Berkshire and Reading	3	Gloucestershire	4	Shropshire	30
Breconshire and Radnorshire	4	Hampshire	6	Somerset	6
Buckinghamshire	4	Hertfordshire	17	Staffordshire	11
Caernarvonshire	4	Huntingdon and Peterborough	3	Suffolk and Ipswich	6
Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely	4	Kent and Canterbury	18	Surrey	7
Cheshire	8	Lancashire	19	Sussex, East	3
Cornwall	2	Leicestershire and Rutland	2	Sussex, West	6
Cumberland	4	Lincs (Holland)	1	Warwickshire	6
Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire	4	Lincs (Kesteven)	1	Wight, Isle of	1
Derbyshire	14	Lincs (Lindsey)	3	Wiltshire	3
Devon and Torbay	4	London (Greater)	132	Worcester City and County	1
Dorset	1	Monmouthshire	1	Yorkshire (East Riding)	1
Durham (County)	6	Norfolk	5	Yorkshire (North Riding)	1
Essex	18	Northamptonshire	9	Yorkshire (West Riding)	18
Flintshire	3	Northumberland	2		
		Nottinghamshire	9		
		Oxfordshire	4		

(C) Scottish Fire Brigades

Brigade	No. of deaths	Brigade	No. of deaths
Glasgow	53	Fife	5
Lanark	9	Perth and Kinross	1
Central	9	Angus	6
Western	8	North Eastern	4
South Western	7	Northern	1
South Eastern	23		

(D) Northern Irish Fire Brigades

Brigade	No. of deaths
South	5
West	1
Belfast	8

TOTALS

ENGLAND AND WALES	669
SCOTLAND	126
NORTHERN IRELAND	14
UNITED KINGDOM	809

