

MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENT

HYDRANTS AND WATER SUPPLY

The following interesting and valuable paper was read at the recent convention, at Vancouver, of the Pacific Coast Association of Fire Chiefs by H.W. Bringham, of Seattle, secretary of the Association:

"The conditions in our north coast towns and cities are peculiar in that, as a rule, nature has provided a most beautiful supply of water for each, which is not yet distributed or made use of to give the protection it could afford against the tremendous fire hazards. Considering our sore experiences of the past we may take this as bearing out the old saying, that the most disastrous conflagrations usually occur in communities having inexhaustible supplies of water within easy reach, as witness those of Chicago and Boston in the East and of Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver, and New Westminster nearer home. It does seem strange that in each case the light of the flames was reflected upon broad bodies of fresh or salt water and yet millions of dollars' worth of valuable property went up in smoke because these could not be properly drawn upon.

Since our disasters great progress has been made, and we now boast of a commendable number of very excellent fire departments, paid, call and volunteer. Yet there are some localities where the happy-go-lucky conditions of fifteen years ago still prevail; our volunteer organizations are not supported as they should be, and one can find certain very ambitious young cities where the stranger will be overwhelmed with facts and figures as to growth in population and industries while the matter of fire protection gets no attention worth speaking of. He looks in vain for a fire-alarm telegraph or a really efficient water system; he may be boastfully informed that the city has a first-class paid department, but upon investigation it is found to be miserably inadequate. Our "old-timers" recognize this state of affairs at once as the same that resulted in the fearful conflagrations of recent years, and say that such people are too short-sighted to profit by the costly experience of other communities, and must be taught by terrible calamities falling upon themselves. But why need this be true? If at any of our conventions means can be devised for bringing one of these shamefully delinquent municipal corporations to a realization of its own fire hazards, and to an intelligent installation of proper fire service, we will be conferring a benefit greatly to the credit of our association.

"History repeats itself and sweeping fires will come in time whenever there is not due preparation and constant vigilance. Should half the business portion of one of these most promising young cities burn to-night, many will call it a visitation of Providence, but those of us who have made a study of the subject will attribute the calamity to inexcusable neglect. Right here it might be said that too much de-

pendence is placed upon statistics of fire losses in former years, upon the false security engendered by long periods of freedom from disaster, which good luck is usually attributable to matters of chance for the most part.

"Coming back to the particular subject of water distribution, the writer believes that even our most advanced cities in this extreme northwest have not yet the protection in their business districts they might reasonably install. Certain of our younger towns of considerable size expect their firemen to do good work with homemade, and often defective, hydrants, two blocks or more apart, even where risks are very great, and only located here and there in residence portions. Hydrants of four inches inside diameter are by no means uncommon. When a big fire comes, long lines of hose must be laid, and the most of the pressure is wasted overcoming friction in hydrant and hose, but the average citizen talks of the eighty or one hundred pounds pressure available and blames the firemen for the weak streams. Our largest cities have by no means hydrants enough in the most dangerous districts, and some of these now in use require the firemen to scratch around in snow or mud to find the valve stems or to look for auxiliary valves outside the curb line because the main shut-offs are entirely unreliable. By reason of the hydrants having only one four-inch discharge opening, more than one steamer cannot be attached to advantage, and so some of the engines are compelled to take position so far from the fire that most of their power is lost by reason of friction. Something is radically wrong when a very large steamer is working at its full capacity on a long line of hose and yet throwing a stream no more effective than could be handled by an engine of little more than half the weight but obtaining its water close in to the fire. Our councilmen could easily be convinced that a double four-inch outlet hydrant at each one of the four corners of a given block affords plenty of water for eight steamers and each of these needs only short lines of hose to reach a fire within that block. Of course the standard two and one-half-inch outlets may be placed on the hydrant also (where hose streams are used direct) if the capacity of the water passage be increased in proportion, but the most important matter, wherever there is more than one outlet, is to insist upon an independent gate for each, so that any one stream may be controlled separately.

(To be continued.)

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