## THE FIRE HAZARD IN TURBO-GENERATORS.

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THAT there is a great chance of serious damage by fire, following arcing in turbo-generators, and suggestions for minimizing this hazard form the subject of a paper by Mr. Lawler appearing in the July number of the Journal of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

The chances of electric generators of the older types being seriously injured by fire in the event of some part of the insulation failing is slight. Occasionally arcing will ignite the insulation at some point, but it is seldom that the fire will spread much before it is extinguished. This freedom from fire damage is due principally to the comparatively low speeds, the accessibility of the combustible insulation, and the fact that the machines, being of large mass per unit capacity, the insulation is considerably distributed.

This condition of practical freedom from fire is reversed in the case of generators of the turbo type, for when a short circuit occurs in one of them there is a great chance that the insulation will be ignited and the machine be badly damaged; in fact such damage has occurred in a number of instances.

The chief causes of the increased hazard in the more modern type generators are as follows:—

1. The volume occupied by this type of machine is very much less for the same capacity than that of the older types of generators, so that the combustible insulation is more concentrated and, therefore, much of it is exposed, even to a slight arc or fire. The covering on the conductors depends greatly for its insulating qualities on the presence of oils or gums of a highly combustible nature. The amount of this combustible insulation on the higher voltage generators is naturally greater than in the low voltage machines.

Owing to turbo-generators having only a few poles the end connections between slots form a large proportion of the total length of conductors, in fact in some designs approximately one-half of the coils are outside of the slots. These end connections, one-half being on one side of the machine and one-half on the other, are exposed to fire, and as with a pile of loosely laid sticks, fire will rapidly extend from the insulation on one coil to that on the others.

2. Owing to these generators being of exceedingly large capacity in many instances, (one of 30,000 kva. capacity now being constructed) an enormous amount of energy is involved in a short circuit, especially at the instant the short occurs and as the arc is confined in the limited space with the combustible insulation, it would seem impossible for the insulation to escape being set on fire at many points simultaneously.

3. The machines are cooled by forcing large quantities of air through the spaces between the conductors. The large and constantly renewed supply of oxygen will hasten combustion when it is once started.

The air is given somewhat of a rotary motion by the rapidly revolving rotor which has the ventilating vanes on it and consequently fire when started will be quickly swept around the exposed insulation.

4. The generators are totally encased with the exception of the air inlets and outlets and even these in some designs are under the machines. This construction prevents access to a fire and much valuable time will necessarily be consumed before extinguishing agents can be used effectively. When the field current is cut off, as is necessary in case of short circuit, the only means of bringing the rotor quickly to rest is lost and it will continue to run for a long time after the steam has been shut off. Some machines will run for over an hour. This continued rotation is not conducive to the quick extinguishing of fire, especially when the ventilating vanes are mounted on the rotor.

In addition to the possible causes of arcing existing in the case of the older types of generators, the turbo-generator is subject to momentary large current rush at instant of short circuit, even if the short is external to the machine itself, unless means are taken to keep the current within safe limits. The heavy rush of current causes mechanical stresses in the conductors, which in some cases are severe enough to distort the conductors, especially where outside the slots, and to injure the insulating covering, resulting in a short circuit within the generator itself. In some designs the internal reactance of the machines will permit of the momentary current rush amounting to 40, or possibly more, times the normal full-load current of the machines.

The possibility of the conductors being distorted has been reduced in some cases by designing generators with sufficient internal reactance, or by providing external reactance such that the current at the moment of short circuit will not be great enough to damage the generators. Attention has also been given to supporting the stator end connections to prevent their distortion. These means have undoubtedly greatly increased the safety of the turbo-type of generator from possibilities of internal short circuit, but in no way tend to prevent a fire resulting should an arc occur.

A short circuit in the rotor will probably not result in a severe fire unless under exceptional conditions. This is also true if the short circuit occurs inside of a stator slot. A short circuit involving a stator coil, however, is more apt to occur at the end of the slot where the conductors are exposed.

As asbestos is now used largely for insulating the rotor windings and as these windings are well protected, it is probable that only in cases of severe fire in a machine will the rotor windings be damaged to any extent.

While the generators may be free from fires during the earlier portions of their life owing to the proper use of reactances which prevent external troubles seriously affecting the machines, as they get older the ordinary causes of breakdown of insulation are liable to occur and fires result. Probably in most cases generators will not be discarded until some trouble, usually in the nature of a short circuit, has occurred at least once in each, so that it is reasonable to expect that unless further preventive means are taken, turbo-generators stand a good chance of serious damage by fire at some time during their life. Although many fires have occurred, probably most of them have happened during the generator development stage. Generators of the turbo type are of such recent production that none of them has yet reached a life which could be considered old and, therefore, the troubles which can be expected near the end of their life by fire have still to come.

Undoubtedly the manufacturing companies have given serious thought to the matter of the reduction of the fire hazard in turbo-generators and have employed all