

State of Iowa

1944

THIRTY-THIRD ANNUAL REPORT 15 1944

OF THE

State Fire Marshal

FOR THE YEAR

1943

JOHN W. STROHM

STATE FIRE MARSHAL

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
DIVISION OF FIRE PREVENTION AND INVESTIGATION

Published by
THE STATE OF IOWA
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DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION
Appointed by the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety
Term, Four Years, Expires July 1, 1947

Office	Name	Legal Residence	County
Fire Marshal.....	John W. Stroh.....	Clinton.....	Clinton.....
Assistant.....	A. Lubberden.....	Pella.....	Marion.....
Assistant.....	C. W. Cornell.....	Bedford.....	Taylor.....
Assistant.....	Zack T. Cook.....	Des Moines.....	Polk.....
Assistant.....	Paul E. Hodgson.....	Alden.....	Hardin.....
Secretary.....	Olive R. Sly.....	Boone.....	Boone.....
Stenographer.....	Grace Foster.....	Des Moines.....	Polk.....

STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S REPORT

Iowa's fire loss increased from \$3,602,151 in 1942 to \$4,762,575 in 1943.

There were 1901 town dwelling fires resulting in a loss of \$617,170, while 219 farm dwelling fires were reported with a loss of \$610,809.

Sparks from chimneys lead in the number of known causes, 826 fires with a loss of \$250,339.

Defective electric wiring caused the largest amount of fire loss of the known causes of fires, \$419,586.

The amount of loss reported as "Unknown" leads all other items with \$1,491,215.

Many of these fires could, no doubt, be attributed to any of the "known" causes.

\$701,312 of the 1943 fire loss occurred in Iowa factories, a number of which are engaged in the manufacture of vital war materials.

21 school fires cost us \$170,189, or an average of \$8,104.23 for each school fire.

174 store fires occurred, resulting in a loss of \$531,710, wasting food, clothing and many other items needed in the war effort.

9 lumber yard fires caused a fire loss of \$83,643, or an average of \$9,293.66 for each fire. Again, valuable war material has been wasted.

FARM FIRE LOSS

Let us look at the farm fire loss for 1943.

The fire loss on farms increased from \$1,121,000 for 1942, to \$1,341,012 for 1943.

219 farm dwelling fires cost \$610,809, and 118 farm barn fires cost us \$325,542, or a total of \$936,351, the balance of the farm fire loss covering machine sheds, corn cribs, granaries, and other miscellaneous farm buildings.

FARM FIRE PREVENTION

We have reason to be proud of the record made by Iowa farm folks—they have responded to the call for help in putting over an effective Farm Fire Prevention program, and while

the farm fire loss shows an increase for 1943, we are confident that future years will show a gradual decline in the fire loss as Iowa's rural communities join in the War Against Fire.

The program sponsored by the Iowa State College at Ames, Iowa, under the direction of Professor R. K. Bliss, and Harold Beaty, in cooperation with Iowa insurance companies, fire prevention organizations and the State Fire Marshal's office has proven a success.

Our schools and 4-H Clubs have responded to the need for an effective fire prevention program.

Cooperation in Fire Prevention means a reduction in Iowa's fire loss in cities and towns as well as in our rural communities.

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK

11,000 fire prevention posters and other fire prevention material were mailed out to Fire Chiefs, County Superintendents of Schools, school teachers, school children and service clubs by the State Fire Marshal's office.

Fire prevention talks were made to 2500 adults and school children in addition to radio broadcasts carried by Iowa radio stations.

IOWA STATE FIRE PREVENTION ASSOCIATION

The Iowa State Fire Prevention Association made

- 13 addresses to 2,051 school children
- 7 addresses to 3,288 adults,

In addition there were a number of 15 minute radio talks over 16 different radio stations, all material furnished by the Iowa State Fire Prevention Association.

ANNUAL FIRE SCHOOL

The Annual Fire School, Ames, had an attendance of approximately 300 firemen in 1943, and plans are now under way for an interesting program for 1944.

Definite dates for the School will be announced later, and we will be looking for you.

TO FIRE CHIEFS, MAYORS AND TOWNSHIP CLERKS:

Are you sending in your fire reports promptly as required by law?

Our state law provides that all fires shall be reported to this office within one week of the occurrence of the fire.

Frequently we receive reports of farm fires sent in by the Fire Chief. These reports cannot be entered on the fire record as reports made by the Fire Chief are charged against the town for which he is acting as Fire Chief, therefore, the fires that occur *outside* of the corporate limits of any city or town **MUST BE** reported by the Township Clerk for the township in which the fire occurs.

Fire Chiefs report **ONLY** those fires that occur *within* the corporate limits of their city or town.

The Mayor is required to report fires that occur in towns where there is no fire department.

FIRE LOSS RECORDS

In checking the records for 1943, we find 41 counties reporting 10 fires or less. In view of the 1943 fire record, we are inclined to believe that all fires have not been reported in accordance with Sections 1624, 1625, 1626, and 1627, Code, Iowa, 1939.

When you hold up your reports for a period of time, perhaps six months or a year, it prevents us from keeping our fire records up to date, and more than doubles the amount of record work and checking the fire loss at the close of the year.

FIRE DRILLS

SECTION 1651, Code, Iowa, 1939—

1651. FIRE DRILLS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS—EXITS UNLOCKED. It shall be the duty of the state fire marshal and his designated subordinate to require teachers of public and private schools, in all buildings of more than one story, to have at least one fire drill each month, and to require all teachers of such schools, whether occupying buildings of one or more stories, to keep all doors and exits of their respective rooms and buildings unlocked during school hours.

FIRE DRILLS IN SCHOOLS

We find some schools where no fire drills are held, and have been told that no fire drills are necessary because the building is fireproof.

No building is sufficiently fireproof to warrant a violation of the state law, therefore, as a part of Iowa's Safety program and Fire Prevention and Fire Protection program, effective and orderly fire drills in all schools are necessary.

INSPECTIONS

FIRE HAZARDS

347 inspections covering fire hazards and compressed gas installations have been made by the State Fire Marshal's office in 43 counties.

The need for the conservation of our resources and the prevention of waste has never been greater than it is today.

While we have been called upon to provide millions of tons of waste material, scrap metal, rubber, paper and other products, there is still a quantity of useless storage in cellars, attics and garages that should be brought out and put to work for Victory.

Paper is our Number One shortage at the present time, therefore, all old paper boxes, cartons, store bags, newspapers, magazines and wastebasket paper are urgently needed for conversion into fighting materials.

An effective Clean-Up Campaign will aid in converting fire hazards and disease-breeders into fighting weapons of war.

Thorough inspections should be made in every home, every place of business, in factories, churches, schools and other public buildings, to eliminate every possible fire hazard and reduce unnecessary waste by fire.

FIRE ESCAPES

We have made 1,405 fire escape inspections in 58 counties, in 1943.

This inspection work will be carried on throughout the state until all schools in Iowa have been inspected and corrections are being made as rapidly as proper materials can be obtained.

ARSON INVESTIGATIONS

We have made 45 investigations in 33 counties during 1943, and obtained confessions and convictions in the following cases:

GRUNDY COUNTY: We made an investigation of a fire that occurred in the County Jail in Grundy Center and obtained a confession.

HOWARD COUNTY: We made an investigation of a fire that occurred in a business house in Riceville. A farm laborer admitted that he started this fire for revenge; pled guilty to the crime of arson and was sentenced to a ten-year indeterminate term in the State penitentiary.

HUMBOLDT COUNTY: This office made an investigation of a fire that occurred in Humboldt where two small boys admitted they were playing with fire and lost control of the flames.

IOWA COUNTY: An investigation was made covering a large factory fire. A confession was obtained and the suspect turned over to the Federal Government inasmuch as the factory was engaged in making war materials.

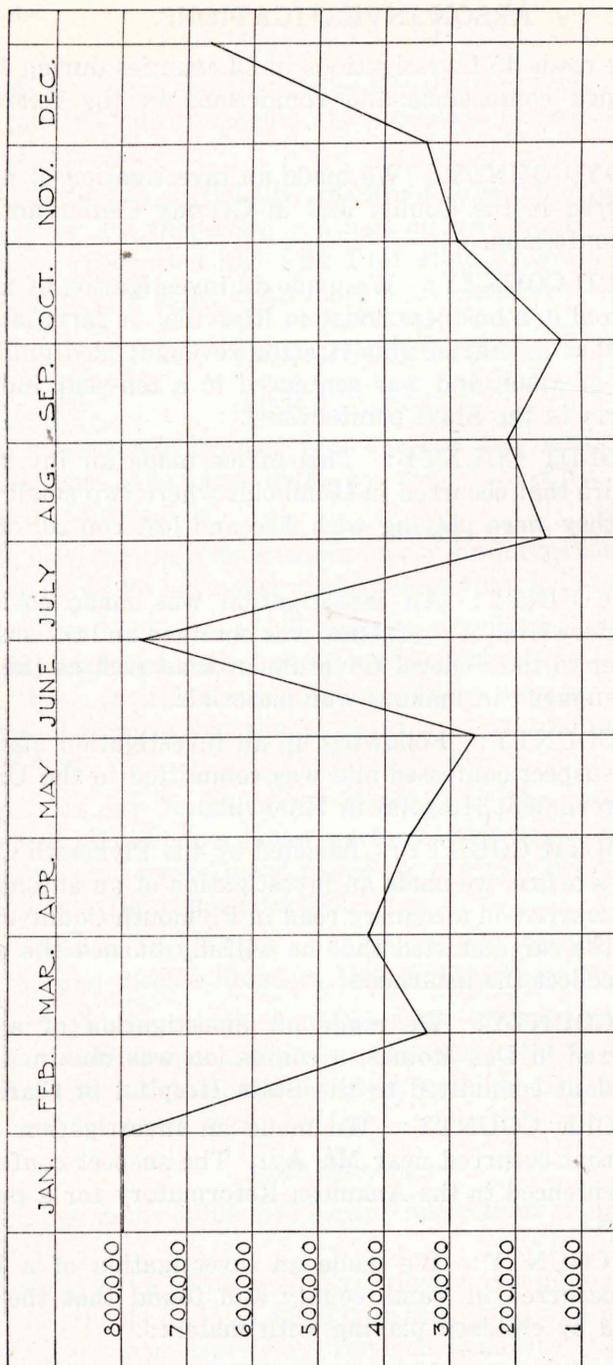
IOWA COUNTY: Following up an investigation made in 1941, the suspect confessed and was committed to the United States Government Hospital in Knoxville.

PLYMOUTH COUNTY: Assisted by the Plymouth County Sheriff's office, we made an investigation of an automobile fire that occurred on a country road in Plymouth County. The owner of the car admitted that he wilfully burned the automobile to collect the insurance.

POLK COUNTY: We made an investigation of a fire that occurred in Des Moines, a confession was obtained and the Defendant committed to the State Hospital in Clarinda.

RINGGOLD COUNTY: We made an investigation of a barn fire that occurred near Mt. Ayr. The suspect confessed and was sentenced to the Anamosa Reformatory for a period of 10 years.

TAMA COUNTY: We made an investigation of a barn fire that occurred in Tama county and found that the fire was caused by children playing with matches.



BY JOHN STROHM
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

TOTAL 4,762,575

IOWA'S FIRE LOSS

(Compiled by Months)

MONTH	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
January	\$ 361,463	\$ 612,782	\$ 357,690	\$ 517,426	\$ 799,327
February	700,392	512,382	398,858	189,349	336,615
March	388,877	516,999	615,546	206,338	426,540
April	450,411	438,048	442,068	613,246	363,333
May	298,258	211,230	211,965	155,516	265,531
June	313,588	230,681	73,782	644,386	774,499
July	343,695	392,640	158,757	142,450	156,570
August	214,636	389,593	165,720	286,134	214,120
September	384,744	228,768	217,146	131,235	133,455
October	429,750	356,922	265,704	234,999	289,065
November	470,149	168,620	228,137	242,072	336,989
December	389,946	390,556	319,670	239,000	666,531
	\$4,745,909	\$4,449,221	\$3,455,043	\$3,602,151	\$4,762,575

The accompanying graph, compiled by the State Fire Marshal's office shows that during April and May, 1943, there was a steady decline in the fire loss, and we believe this is due to the extensive clean-up campaigns carried on during that period, eliminating numerous fire hazards.

During the month of September, when a number of Fire Prevention programs were given by the schools, and other social groups, preparing for Fire Prevention Week activities, the fire loss reached the lowest point of the year. This proves that when we take time to practice Fire Prevention, the fire loss can be reduced.

Why not make EVERY WEEK a FIRE PREVENTION WEEK?

NATIONAL FIRE LOSS

The national fire loss for 1943 amounted to \$382,235,800, or an increase of 21 per cent over the 1942 fire loss.

IOWA'S PER CAPITA FIRE LOSS

Year	Fire Loss	Per Capita
1939	\$ 4,745,909	\$ 1.87
1940	4,449,921	1.75
1941	3,455,043	1.43
1942	3,602,151	1.43
1943	4,762,575	1.87

TABLE NO. I

Showing the total number of fires reported by counties. Cities of more than 10,000 are set out separately. Damage to buildings and contents is combined.

Counties and Cities	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Adair	5	\$ 16,775
Adams	4	3,800
Allamakee	4	10,845
Appanoose	34	14,597
Audubon	14	15,885
Benton	28	30,732
Black Hawk—Waterloo	148	104,936
Balance—Black Hawk County	17	43,009
Boone—Boone	60	14,606
Balance—Boone County	16	31,275
Bremer	17	30,237
Buchanan	35	46,993
Buena Vista	23	46,186
Butler	10	40,525
Calhoun	24	17,152
Carroll	34	135,316
Cass	24	7,765
Cedar	16	69,236
Cerro Gordo—Mason City	87	*31,898
Balance—Cerro Gordo County	3	15,100
Cherokee	10	18,485
Chickasaw	9	10,337
Clarke	12	17,785
Clay	28	26,181
Clayton	30	47,467
Clinton—Clinton	89	*29,146
Balance—Clinton County	12	5,092
Crawford	15	48,767
Dallas	11	10,710
Davis	11	18,259
Decatur	10	26,625
Delaware	10	12,389
Des Moines—Burlington	105	158,452
Balance—Des Moines County	7	3,795
Dickinson	6	4,005
Dubuque—Dubuque	98	143,314
Balance—Dubuque County	1	3,200
Emmet	10	34,305
Fayette	49	98,850
Floyd	20	17,707
Franklin	13	19,775
Fremont	7	13,711
Greene	10	30,493
Grundy	19	40,353
Guthrie	7	7,150
Hamilton	17	22,626
Hancock	12	19,184
Hardin	17	25,111
Harrison	32	31,649
Henry	7	5,728
Howard	2	9,525
Humboldt	18	106,945

TABLE NO. I—Continued

Counties and Cities	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Ida	13	5,845
Iowa	11	316,301
Jackson	17	22,474
Jasper	44	302,561
Jefferson	37	15,012
Johnson—Iowa City	45	52,291
Balance—Johnson County	4	20,025
Jones	3	8,525
Keokuk	8	8,155
Kossuth	18	14,413
Lee—Fort Madison	52	39,002
Keokuk	35	29,323
Balance—Lee County	3	2,135
Linn—Cedar Rapids	171	137,558
Balance—Linn County	34	39,502
Louisa County	11	30,829
Lucas	1	25
Lyon	13	7,913
Madison	22	23,697
Mahaska—Oskaloosa	38	40,505
Balance—Mahaska County	18	49,825
Marion	30	24,790
Marshall—Marshalltown	50	13,294
Balance—Marshall County	4	11,700
Mills	9	9,075
Mitchell	3	6,050
Monona	11	14,495
Monroe	15	7,885
Montgomery	21	12,674
Muscatine—Muscatine	75	20,134
Balance—Muscatine County	6	752
O'Brien	23	7,543
Osceola	9	106,326
Page	19	13,498
Palo Alto	9	44,141
Plymouth	31	77,368
Pocahontas	10	34,550
Polk—Des Moines	870	440,357
Balance—Polk County	34	29,227
Pottawattamie—Council Bluffs	206	46,722
Balance—Pottawattamie County	10	46,554
Poweshiek	23	7,316
Ringgold	14	13,456
Sac	13	14,637
Scott—Davenport	165	101,212
Balance—Scott County	17	112,006
Shelby	25	26,357
Sioux	13	12,486
Story—Ames	54	26,583
Balance—Story County	25	87,437
Tama	32	69,754
Taylor	10	7,565
Union	12	29,508
Van Buren	6	18,812
Wapello—Ottumwa	15	*43,834
Balance—Wapello County	5	6,916
Warren	24	19,102
Washington	10	17,550

TABLE NO. I—Continued

Counties and Cities	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Wayne	10	15,633
Webster—Fort Dodge	58	16,248
Balance—Webster County	8	11,835
Winnebago	6	2,000
Winneshiek	6	1,069
Woodbury—Sioux City	260	144,094
Balance—Woodbury County	11	9,548
Worth	8	13,307
Wright	10	7,300
	4,190	\$4,762,575

*Fire loss shown for Mason City and Clinton covers 11 months period.

Fire loss shown for Ottumwa covers 6 months period.

TABLE NO. II

Showing the kind of property destroyed. Damage to Buildings and Contents set out separately.

Kind of Property	No. Fires	Damage Buildings	Damage Contents
Automobiles	300	\$ 21,647	\$ 11,133
Trucks	58	35,014	2,235
Auto accessories	2	60	50
Auto repair shops	5	4,160	1,515
Tire shops	4	393	92
Awnings	37	3,986	0
Bakeries	9	6,369	15,018
Banks	3	6,585	1,500
Barns—FARM	118	231,873	93,669
TOWN	46	21,836	11,268
Beer taverns	27	15,122	9,510
Bridges	1	1,000	0
Cars—Box cars and coal cars.....	9	1,393	1,922
Passenger and street cars and buses	12	1,068	0
Car repair shops and round-houses	0	0	0
Chicken brooders and hatcheries	75	19,107	7,765
Chicken and poultry houses	35	13,276	8,870
Churches	20	48,858	7,169
Cleaning and dyeing	12	9,689	40,774
Coal mines	0	0	0
Corn cribs and granaries	23	31,125	37,645
Creameries — cream stations and dairies	12	4,372	2,097
Dance Halls	2	38,000	7,000
Depots—freight and passenger	3	102,154	31,596
Elevators and seed houses	7	18,225	12,155
Engine and boiler rooms	3	2,160	600
Factories	44	233,032	468,280
Filling stations	21	7,449	5,163
Oil storage	6	3,424	1,710
Foundries	6	42,356	60,725
Funeral homes	3	10,000	3,508

TABLE NO. II—Continued

Kind of Property	No. Fires	Damage Buildings	Damage Contents
Garages—Private	217	45,098	81,082
Public	38	39,145	17,437
Hay, grain and straw stacks, grain fields and meadows	25	3,083	0
Hog houses	18	16,749	11,865
Hospitals and Nurses' Homes	4	50,795	25,075
Hotels	24	8,962	8,054
Houses—Apartments	106	41,057	25,219
Fraternity	4	11,342	6,076
Farm	219	458,761	152,048
Town	1,901	445,700	171,470
Rooming houses	18	5,030	804
Summer kitchen — wash houses	16	2,057	2,320
Ice houses	1	5	0
Laundries	4	1,010	880
Lodge halls	3	1,302	1,069
Lumber yards	9	26,872	56,771
Meat markets	5	257	1,017
Mills—feed mills and feed stores.....	7	42,210	34,456
Flour	2	25	0
Office and office buildings	31	6,471	9,281
Packing plants and stock yards	5	1,674	1,030
Pool halls—bowling alleys	9	9,950	15,420
Printing plants	5	4,532	12,443
Produce houses	8	2,619	5,795
Pump and engine houses	12	8,113	7,656
Restaurants, cafes and lunch rooms	39	17,374	15,641
Schools	21	152,987	17,202
Sheds—coal and wood	70	5,945	996
Machine sheds	22	8,208	20,106
Shops—Barber	9	2,760	1,835
Blacksmith	2	200	850
Carpenter and work shops	10	1,268	1,109
Hair dressing shops	6	2,275	2,060
Plumbing and heating	3	1,473	3,349
Shoe repair shops	3	635	55
Smoke houses	2	84	327
Stores	174	226,554	305,165
Theatres	11	15,082	12,756
Trailer houses	12	2,481	1,155
Warehouses and storage	89	65,114	90,525
Miscellaneous	123	63,096	67,119
	4,190	\$ 2,732,088	\$ 2,030,487
			2,732,088
			\$ 4,762,575

TABLE NO. III

Cause of Fire	No. Fires	Fire Loss
Adjoining	184	\$ 235,029
Ashes and coal against wood	39	11,907
Auto backfire	38	5,398
Auto wreck	5	28,115
Broken gas line—alcohol on motor	71	10,741
Blow and oil torches	31	196,676
Bonfires—grass fires	179	41,349
Brooder lamps and stoves	72	16,231
Candle, lamp and lantern carelessness	16	18,068
Children with matches	125	30,681
Cleaning clothing, rugs and floors with gasoline.....	2	367
Clothing too near stove and stovepipes	16	6,589
Compressed gas	1	2,500
Curtains blowing into flames	10	419
Defective auto wiring	148	21,059
Defective electric wiring	163	419,586
Defective electric cords, lamps, appliances and Neon Signs	40	26,687
Defective electric appliances	7	2,258
Defective fireplace	8	1,024
Defective flues	254	265,459
Defective and overheated stoves and heating plants	142	113,385
Defective oil burners	19	8,034
Defective oil and gasoline stoves	163	81,601
Defective and overheated pipes to stoves and furnaces	72	42,805
Dust in hot air registers	10	1,370
Electric iron—current left on	21	6,718
Films	6	2,538
Fireworks	0	0
Friction	9	6,370
Fumigation	3	1,298
Gas leak	3	4,524
Gasoline and kerosene carelessness	44	89,144
Gasoline and volatile oil explosion	8	5,409
Grease, paint, tar, wax and food boiling over	35	11,355
Incendiary	17	278,220
Lightning—rodded	8	34,381
Not rodded	100	170,921
Match carelessness	48	9,157
Rubbish piled against furnace and flues	18	5,612
Short circuit—electric motors, refrigerators, etc.	98	73,088
Smoker's carelessness	385	193,745
Smoking meat	2	388
Sparks from engines and locomotives	33	43,176
Sparks from chimney	826	250,339
Sparks from stoves and furnaces	29	15,208
Spontaneous combustion—coal-dust	10	20,480
Hay, straw, grain, feed	17	33,819
Rags—rubbish	57	64,285
Static electricity	10	41,580
Thawing water pipes	24	105,547
Unknown	471	1,491,215
Using gasoline and kerosene to start fires	13	17,852
Miscellaneous	80	198,868
	4,190	\$ 4,762,575

CONCLUSION

Radio stations and newspapers throughout Iowa have given generously of their time and space for Fire Prevention messages; our schools, civic and social clubs, 4-H Clubs, and Fire Prevention organizations have taken an active part in our Fire Prevention program.

State, County and City officials have given us their full cooperation at all times, and now we want to take this opportunity to thank you one and all for your cooperation throughout 1943.

Why not start now to plan a definite reduction in our 1944 fire loss?

Respectfully submitted,

JOHN W. STROHM, *State Fire Marshal*
DIVISION OF FIRE PROTECTION AND INVESTIGATION
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

