

WARNS OF LET-DOWN IN FIGHT ON FIRES

**Former Chief Croker Would
Have Fifty-Two Prevention
Weeks Each Year.**

GIVES LIFE'S EXPERIENCE

**Declares Carelessness Is Responsible
for 65 Per Cent. of Losses, and
Billions Could Be Saved.**

Former Fire Chief Edward F. Croker raises the question why the City of New York, the State and the nation does not make every one of the fifty-two weeks in the year a "Fire Prevention Week." Mr. Croker declared that he was convinced that 65 per cent. of the fires he was called on to extinguish while he was head of New York's fire fighting force were caused through carelessness.

"When I read in the daily press the proclamation of the President of the United States, the Governor of the Empire State, and the Chief Magistrate of this wonderful city, setting aside the week of Oct 2 as Fire Prevention Week," said Mr Croker, "the thought is brought forcibly home to my mind as to why one week in a whole year is dedicated to the prevention of fires. Is it then to be inferred that the remaining fifty-one weeks are to be dedicated to their extinguishment?"

"I do know that this inference is wrong, but nevertheless, why not make the entire fifty-two weeks of the year fire prevention weeks. The reason is obvious and the fact remains that 'a burned cat dreads the fire,' and most of the public apparently are compelled to have the subject of fire brought directly home to them, at least figuratively, before the terrible lesson of destruction, with possible death toll in its wake can be indelibly impressed upon the minds of the unthinking great American public.

After a knowledge gained by an experience of over a quarter of a century fighting a countless number of fires in the City of New York, nearly half of which time I served as the chief of the greatest fire fighting organization in the world, and after many hours of mature thought, I arrived at the conclusion that at least sixty-five per cent of the fires I had been called upon to extinguish were unnecessary if the proper preventive measures had been adopted beforehand.

"As an instance I may cite the fact that a few years ago the City, State and nation was shocked at the result of a fire which occurred in a ten-story, modern, fireproof building in the downtown manufacturing district where the lives of one hundred and forty-nine employes were snuffed out in their fruitless attempt to escape from the ninth floor, and this terrible holocaust in broad daylight was started from a cigarette stub thrown carelessly by a workman on the floor which at that time was littered with clippings of shirt-waist material scattered about an unswept factory, and it was due to the heroic and characteristic conduct on the part of courageous men of the New York Fire Department that the lives of two hundred other human beings then in the building were not sacrificed on the altar of carelessness. Every one then thought that the final lesson had been learned, but had it? A few months later the very same thing happened on a smaller scale in a factory in the City of Binghamton, and then in another few months occurred the human sacrifice in a factory in Newark, N. J., under the same identical conditions. These fires, with their heavy toll of innocent lives thrown into eternity, had their incipency in a single spark, and remember, at this time, all fires, no matter to what magnitude they may later develop, were the same size at the start.

"To my mind these facts go to prove my theory, that one Fire Prevention Week per year is not sufficient and I cannot advocate any too strenuously the fact that fifty-two weeks per year of fire prevention should be the minimum.

Must Keep Up Fight All the Time.

"After giving the entire subject serious study for many years from the viewpoint of a practical fireman, I have decided that while preventive medicine has for a long period been making rapid strides as a science, an equally important factor in the welfare and even the life of the citizen (I refer to fire prevention) has been almost entirely neglected.

"Although modern fire extinguishing methods have been highly perfected, too little attention has been paid to the vital matter of preventing fires, and it must be borne in mind that the cost of fires is greater than the cost of fire prevention. Our building or our home may be the next to take fire; a fireproof building is no exception, since time and again such buildings have been gutted and their contents destroyed.

"Where a fire occurs the insurance policy covers only a fraction of the loss, it reimburses us for the loss of physical property only, it cannot indemnify us for lost time and business, or for the loss of lives of those who are near and dear.

"During the past forty-one years the aggregate fire waste of the United States and Canada, reached the enormous total of \$7,031,966,820, showing an annual average property destruction of \$171,511,385.85. and it is a well recognized fact by those who make a study of fire loss causes that of the large majority of fires fully 65 per cent. occur from easily preventable causes. Taking this as a basis of calculation, the country's preventable fire losses during the past forty-one years amount to the sum of \$4,570,778,433, and the application of modern prevention methods would stop the largest part of this waste of property, not to mention the saving of life. Therefore, in conclusion, let us ever keep before us a thought of the 'enemy who never sleeps,' this in conjunction with the slogan, 'Servant not master.'"