

KANSAS STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
F. P. Helm, M. D., Secretary

Kansas Home Accident Deaths

Home accidents, as usual, took more lives in Kansas in 1940, than any other type of accidental injury. The total of 1,362 accidental deaths last year was distributed as follows: home -- 530; motor vehicle -- 495; occupational -- 187; public (other than motor vehicle) -- 150. For the eleven-year period 1930-1940, there were fewer deaths caused by home accidents last year than in any year since 1934, when on account of excessive heat, the all-time high of 751 was recorded; the lowest number of home accident deaths, during this 11-year period was reported in 1932, when the total was 485.

It is rather staggering to know that in only the eleven-year period we have been considering, 6,343 persons have died as the result of home accidents in Kansas. There has been a general tendency, always, to take a resigned, can't-be-helped attitude toward the injuries and deaths caused by home accidents, especially those suffered by elderly persons. When home accident deaths occur, there is a short piece in the paper, relatives and neighbors are saddened, but very few persons, unfortunately, analyze and profit by the warning emphasized by the accident.

We know, from studying accidental deaths in the state year after year, that the chief cause of these fatalities is carelessness. Reports have shown that more persons are burned to death in their homes each year because of the dangerous habit of "starting or hurrying fires with kerosene" than from any other cause. For years, the state health department has warned the people of Kansas against this habit -- but the warning falls on too many deaf ears, for the fatal burns from this cause continue to be reported. There is a strange psychology which prevails among our people; they seem to believe that they are protected, by some powerful immunity, from accidents -- and that the warnings issued against the practices that kill, are for the benefit of "the other fellow."

The "accidents will happen attitude" that most of us have toward the home injuries that kill so many elderly persons, can hardly be justified when the victims are little children, yet children less than five years of age are fatally injured in home accidents with sickening frequency. Of the 530 home accident deaths in Kansas last year, 61 were in children less than five years of age -- 17 were smothered to death; 12 were burned to death; 11 were accidentally drowned; 8 died because of accidental poisoning; two were fatally injured in falls; one died because of excessive heat and one from the absorption of poisonous gas, and in nine children, less than five years of age, the specific type of home accident causing death was not reported. Only three of the five-year age groups show accidents occurring with greater frequency than in children less than five years of age, namely: there were 65 accidental deaths in persons from 75-79 years of age; 91 such deaths in persons from 80-84 years of age, and 71 accident fatalities in persons in the 85-89 year age group.

In the home accident deaths, females always outnumber the males, and in 1940 there was a difference of 100, when these fatalities were classified by sex. In all other types of accidental deaths, the males far outnumber the females. In the lower age groups, more males than females are killed in home accidents -- it