

Topics

Good Work

Alarms and Excursions

The New York City Fire Department responded to 55,000 fewer false alarms in the first six months of this year than in the same period last year. This does not mean that mischief-makers sent in 55,000 fewer false alarms; the Fire Department has simply stopped responding to some alarms, and without any disastrous consequences.

After a successful test, the department found that it missed almost no real fires by refusing to answer signals from voice-alarm boxes until the person who pushed the button spoke to the dispatcher over the microphone. For nine years firemen had been afraid this policy might ignore alarms sent in by mutes, by those who couldn't speak English or by others too frightened to talk. But in a six-month trial, only four real fires were ignored. They were immediately reported again, with no deaths or injuries resulting from the delays.

Even with the new program, fire engines have rolled to more than 81,000 false alarms this year. But the 55,000 that they avoided saved the city at least \$2.5 million. What's more, the department says that the number of false alarms has dropped by 13 percent. Perhaps it's no big thrill to send in a false alarm when one knows the engines might never arrive.

More than 100,000 mutes, meanwhile, have been taught how to tap out a code signal on the telegraph key in-

side each voice-alarm box. When firemen hear the code, they come running, voice or no voice.

Firemen still respond to alarms originating from the old-fashioned voiceless boxes. There are more of these than of the ones with microphones. Yet they account for barely 30 percent of false alarms. The reason seems to be that children find them harder to use. Which, on balance, may be just as well.

Doing the Job on Jobs

It's an unhappy commentary on the troubles of social programs generally that the timely, uneventful launching of New York City's summer youth-jobs program is cause for celebration. The Koch administration, in any case, has started up the \$33-million program for needy teen-agers very smoothly. In past summers, it has been plagued by confusion over how much money it should get, by faulty selection procedures and by delays in actually putting young people on payrolls.

As early as last fall, Department of Employment planners wrenched themselves away from their daily crises long enough to plan the 1979 summer program with care. They also eliminated some of the inequalities in their lottery system for choosing participants. Now, having gotten the program off to a good start, manpower officials can attend to the even tougher task of making summer jobs not just a

holding operation but a rewarding experience in real work.

The Producers

New York's Greenmarkets have been called back by popular demand. Fresh farm produce will once again be available for people who would rather eat that vine-ripened tomato or sweet corn-on-the-cob than read about it on some mendacious menu. In spite of a few complaints from local merchants and from residents of high-traffic areas, the weekly farmers' markets have been extended this year to ten locations in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

The sponsor of the Greenmarkets, the Council on the Environment of New York City, claims they have other advantages besides fresh produce. The shorter delivery distance can save energy and reduce air pollution. And, since nearby farmers are probably planting additional acreage to supply the Greenmarkets, less of that farmland may be lost to hard-top development and the region's rural economy may get a little stronger.

But whether the plan pays or not, the produce tastes just fine. The pleasure of market day is as old as summer. The producers have the entertainment and profit of a visit to town, and the consumers get their sun-drenched zucchini and new lettuce right off the truck. Compared with the cellophane-clad version in the supermarkets, the radishes look like rubies.