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FIRE GUARD DUTIES FOR SWISS NATIONALS.

In view of the fact that foreigners in Switzerland can be called upon to join fire fighting units, the Swiss Government have approved of the proposal of the British Authorities that Swiss nationals in the United Kingdom should be liable to carry out fire watching duties. Most of our compatriots residing in Great Britain have volunteered for fire watching right from the beginning of the war, but the Orders made under the new Defence (Fire Guard) Regulations, which came into force on the 20th September this year, make fire guard duties compulsory for Swiss nationals of both sexes.

Under the provisions of the Fire Guard (Local Authority Services) Order, 1943 compulsorily enrolled Swiss nationals (male persons having attained the age of 18 and not 63, women having attained the age of 20 and not 45) will not be directed to perform fire guard duties except as a member of a street fire party for the street fire party area in which they live. If the necessity arises, they may, however, be ordered to reinforce the fire guards in an adjoining sector, to report fires, or to summon the assistance of the National Fire Service.

Under the Fire Guard (Business and Government Premises) Order, 1943, Swiss men working at non-residential premises are liable to perform fire guard duties at the premises at which they work; they may, however, be directed to reinforce other fire guards in the neighbourhood, to report fires, or to summon the assistance of the National Fire Service. In case an adequate number of men are not available, Swiss women, like British and other women, within the age limit [the same as in the Fire Guard (Local Authority Services) Order, 1943], may be called upon to perform fire guard duties at non-residential premises where they work. Fire watching at business and government premises has priority over fire guard duties at the residence of the individual.

This means that men employed at non-residential premises, such as factories and commercial premises, are liable to perform fire guard duties there, but, if they have to do so, they will be exempt from fire guard duties where they live on producing to the local authorities a certificate from their employer that they do duties where they work. The Fire Guard (Business and Government Premises) Order, 1943, provides that additional travelling expenses reasonably incurred by fire guards are to be refunded to them by the occupier of the business premises or the appropriate department for the government premises where the duties are performed. Subsistence allowances on the Government scale, ranging from 3/- to 6/-, according to the length of time they remain on duty, are to be paid to fire guards who perform their duties outside their working hours and away from their homes. These subsistence allowances, but not travelling expenses, will be reimbursed to the occupier of the premises by His Majesty's Government.

Under the Fire Guard (Medical and Hardship Exemptions) Order, 1943, exemption from all fire guard duties may be sought on the ground that the applicant is medically unfit or that it would be an exceptional hardship for him to perform them. For this purpose a form of application is obtainable from any local office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.

The obligation to perform fire guard duties is not imposed on a Swiss national unless he or she is exempt from curfew restrictions to the extent necessary to enable him or her adequately to perform those duties. The existing procedure for granting applications by Swiss nationals for exemption of this kind is being examined.

FROM THE LEGATION.

(We publish the letter which the Swiss Minister has received from the Head of the Department Politique in answer to the telegram sent to the Federal Council on August 1st this year.

Owing to a delay in the official mail, the letter arrived just a day too late for publication in our last issue).

Berne, le 1 août 1943.

Monsieur le Ministre,

Nous avons eu l'honneur de recevoir le télégramme par lequel vous avez bien voulu exprimer au Conseil Fédéral et au Département Politique, à l'occasion de la fête nationale du 1er août, les sentiments d'attachement de vos collaborateurs et de la Colonie suisse à notre patrie.

Nous avons été très sensibles à votre message et vous en remercions. Nous vous serions obligés de bien vouloir être également, auprès de vos collaborateurs et de nos compatriotes, l'interprète de nos remerciements.

Vous voudrez bien leur transmettre les vœux que nous formons, en ces heures difficiles, pour leur bonheur et leur prospérité.

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Ministre, l'assurance de notre haute considération.

signé BONNA,

Le Chef de la Division des Affaires étrangères.

Monsieur W. Thurnheer,

Ministre de Suisse,
Londres.

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