

Dr. J. Roels
32 Avenue des Azalees
Brussels, Belgium

December 20, 1938

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#32 Avenue des Azalees
Brussels

Dear Doctor Roels:

I had the pleasure last summer of visiting Brussels and of talking with Dr. Stassens of the Government Health Department concerning the introduction of leaded gasoline into Belgium. It has always been my purpose to make sure that we have a capable medical advisor to supervise the mixing operations within any country, and I was very much pleased to have Dr. Stassens recommend that you be approached on this subject.

Since that time I have heard from commercial representatives of Ethyl Export Corporation, who have told me that you have agreed to look after this work. I am very glad that you find it possible to do so since I feel confident that this means that this work can be carried out in Belgium without any serious difficulties.

I am sending to you under separate cover, a bound volume of the published articles from this laboratory which I believe you will find of interest. It seems probable that you have availed yourself of the information which is in the hands of Dr. Stassens, but in any case I think you will find it useful to have this volume for reference. Along with it I am sending a memorandum for medical consultants which I prepared with the idea of calling attention to the general policies of the Medical Department of Ethyl Export Corporation. I believe there is nothing in these policies which will conflict in any way with your official duties. I send you also a few more recent articles which I think will be of interest to you.

In addition to the information which is in the articles, I wish to call your attention to one danger which will not arise for some time in Belgium but which is worthy of anticipation. Under certain conditions lead compounds accumulate in tanks which have been used for mixing and storing leaded gasoline. In recognition of this, we have issued certain regulations for precautions in cleaning such tanks. It is important

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that these regulations be put into effect whenever such tanks are to be cleaned. I shall not discuss this subject in detail for we shall soon be preparing a complete report of our study of this problem. I mention it here merely to bring it to your attention.

I should appreciate it if you would write me from time to time and particularly if any difficulties arise. It is possible that I can be of some assistance to you in avoiding such difficulties, and I shall be happy to do so.

In the above connection, my attention has been called to the fact that a small chemical manufacturing company by the name of "Compromat" has been carrying on work which indicates their intention of manufacturing an anti-knock compound in Belgium. From such information as has come to me, this compound contains a volatile lead compound, and it is presumed that the patent of Ethyl Export Corporation would be something of a deterrent to this enterprise. However this phase of the matter does not interest me. I am much more concerned with the fact that the manufacture of these compounds is an extremely hazardous affair, and I should very much hate to see a repetition of the difficulties which occurred in this country. Wherever volatile lead compounds have been manufactured, even in comparatively small amounts, without a stringent medical supervision, trouble has occurred from a series of cases of poisoning and there have usually been deaths. As a consequence of this difficulty, we undertook years ago a most careful study of the hazards of this work, and we have systematically, over a period of years, given our best advice and attention to the development of safety devices. The result of this has been that a means of manufacturing these lead compounds with safety has been provided. It has been, however, a very costly enterprise. We have had to work with the engineers of the manufacturing in such a way as to get the most useful and effective arrangements of factory, ventilation, dust disposal and all such similar precautions. I am quite confident that when these manufacturers in Belgium attempt to produce these lead compounds on a large scale, they will repeat the errors which have been made by their predecessors with the result that you will have cases of poisoning, and you will have a serious hygienic problem to deal with. I should like to see this avoided not only because it is unnecessary to repeat these incidents, but also because it would be an exceedingly bad thing for the commercial interests of Ethyl Export Corporation. The latter reason is not, of course, the most important one from a medical point of view, but it does merit some consideration.

If and when this problem arises in an acute form, I should be pleased if you would let me know about it. I am in position to give you a great deal of detailed information as to the safety provisions which are necessary in such chemical plants. I should much prefer to give you all the knowledge that I have in this matter, including representative drawings and equipment, rather than to see serious difficulties arise in this field.

As an example of what I mean, this same question arose in Italy some years ago. I attempted to forestall it by advising the people who were undertaking the manufacture of tetraethyl lead. They failed to take seriously what I told them because they believed I was merely trying to make it difficult for them to compete with Ethyl Export Corporation by throwing all manner of obstacles in the form of expensive equipment in their way. Proceeding on their own judgment, they manufactured tetraethyl lead but as a consequence there were several deaths, a series of cases of illness, and finally it was found necessary to make use of safety provisions, similar to those I had outlined. I am sure from my experience that one can expect a repetition of these same difficulties unless these plants are built and operated on the basis of the experience which has already been gained in this field.

I have not written to Dr. Stassens on this point. I shall do so only if you so advise me. I think, however, you might discuss the matter with him and if either you or he are desirous of obtaining more information from me, I should be glad to contribute all of the information which I have.

Very truly yours,

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Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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