

June 25, 1928

Mr. E. W. Webb,  
c/o Ethyl Gasoline Corp.,  
25 Broadway,  
New York City.

My dear Mr. Webb:

I have your letter of June 22 enclosing your correspondence with Dr. Calingaert and also the report of Dr. Schoenleber. From what we know of the Yonkers Laboratory other than what Dr. Calingaert has stated, I am inclined to be very skeptical about any relationship of lead to the illness of Mr. [REDACTED] and the other man who works in the same capacity. The symptoms of illness which have been described in connection with this man are by no means specific, and a diagnosis of early tetraethyl lead poisoning must needs be made only after the most careful consideration. There are so many other things which can produce weakness, loss of appetite, and subnormal blood pressure that I should find myself quite unable to make a diagnosis of lead intoxication from these symptoms of it. However, it is obvious that in the presence of certain hazards connected with handling tetraethyl lead it is best to regard any illness as due to the occupation, unless one can find very good reasons for believing otherwise, for the reason that one must always regard the safety of these men as the most important function of an industrial physician. I can sympathize, therefore, with Dr. Schoenleber's effort to bring about a critical examination of the conditions under which these men are working. I do not, however, share his feeling that the man's condition may be considered as due in all likelihood to the absorption of lead. I have several reasons for feeling this way, reasons which it is not immediately necessary to discuss.

Under these circumstances and particularly if Mr. [REDACTED] has any anxiety about his condition, I believe it would be advisable if he made a visit to Cincinnati and remained here for sufficient time so that we could not only give him a careful physical examination but make such laboratory tests as would make it possible to arrive at a diagnosis and either convict him of having symptoms due to lead absorption, or definitely rule out that possibility. It is not well to allow things of this sort to go on in the hope that they will turn out all right. However, if any suspicion attaches itself to the hygienic conditions of the Yonkers Laboratory some very embarrassing situations might arise.

We have from time to time inspected the Yonkers laboratory and have gone into the question of care in handling fluid and gasoline repeatedly, and we have no reason to believe that precautions have not been well taken. I think, however, the next time I am in the East I will make it a point

to visit the laboratory unannounced and carefully look into certain of their procedures. If you have any reason to feel that this should be done at once please let me know. However, I have no immediate worry about the manner of handling hazards at the Yonkers laboratory.

If the above suggestion meets with your approval I would suggest that we be notified a day or two in advance of Mr. [REDACTED] coming in order that I may be certain to be present when he arrives. It will not be necessary for him to go to a hospital, but he can spend his time very comfortably at a hotel for forty eight to seventy two hours while we are making the necessary observations.

I do not know by what processes of examination Dr. Schoenleber and his associates have arrived at the conclusion set forth in the report and it is perhaps too early to speak authoritatively about such a matter, but I can not but wonder whether it is good policy to have employees of the Corporation cared for by men who arrive at conclusions of this importance on what seems to me to be scanty information. The present incident alone does not justify such a question in my mind - I cannot but remember that both Schoenleber and his associates have shown a considerable inclination to be stampeded and to regard every sort of symptom that appears as being due to tetraethyl lead. I wonder, therefore, to what extent and in what manner they have discussed their opinion with Mr. [REDACTED] and what his point of view will be about the whole matter. I am sure you will appreciate the importance of this when you remember the difficulties which have been had in the past with men whose symptoms have been more or less indefinite. If such a man gets the idea, and especially if he gets it from a medical source, that he has been injured by tetraethyl lead it becomes very difficult to disabuse him of the idea, and if he happens to be of such character as to willingly take advantage of his employer it becomes immediately a serious thing. I may be anticipating difficulties which have no possibility of occurrence, and in this instance I am merely thinking aloud in order to give you some notion of what takes place in my mind when this type of incident occurs. The whole matter causes me to wonder if it would not be better in every way for us to go to some little inconvenience in order to keep these men under our own observation. I would appreciate knowing what you think about it.

Very truly yours,

RAK:EJ

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