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KETTERING LABORATORY
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

July 8, 1971

Miss Nancy Stocker
Center for Science in the Public Interest
1346 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Room 812
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Miss Stocker:

I am afraid you are considering the least comprehensive paper which I have written on the subject of lead in food and beverages. I was assigned the subject which you have indicated in your letter, as my means of participating in this symposium, and, being a good soldier, I did what I was asked to do. The work which I have directed in this Laboratory for many years, in which I have been assisted by a number of highly competent persons, is to be found in part in a reprint of three lectures (The Harben Lectures, sponsored regularly by the Royal Institute of Health and Hygiene in London), which I gave in 1960, in an effort to cover the high spots in thirty odd years of investigation. I am sending a copy of this reprint to you, to provide answers which will be much more useful than my letter.

However, to answer your direct questions, the contribution made by the city water in Cincinnati (which was employed by the subjects of our investigations (as indicated in the text of the reprint) was at no time unusual, and while it was a more or less negligible quantity, it was always measured daily. In the course of 1 year it amounted to about 6 milligrams. You can calculate the average daily intake (365 or 366 days) for yourself.

As to the contribution made to the food by containers, skillets, etc., with which it came in contact, I cannot say, beyond the fact that every reasonable effort was made to have the food handled in as satisfactory a manner as possible. In the course of twenty odd years and thousands of days, the food obtained, prepared in the kitchens, and handled at tables (where it was eaten), the composite food samples rarely yielded unusually high results (indicative of some especially contaminated food). They may be regarded as the result of somewhat more careful procedures, than would be the case in a great number of the households of this country. The use of unsatisfactory tableware or pottery, is not common in this country. It occurs from time to time in unusual households, not necessarily, those of poor people, but rather those in which there are collectors items, or travelers items, or those in which the womenfolk, in particular, have artistic talents and enough money to humor such talents. Ordinary, relatively inexpensive tableware, is rarely very bad in this respect, while the ordinary culinary ware in the kitchen is generally (not always) satisfactory. Moreover, American cans are usually of little consequence (there have been exceptions) as bearers of contamination with lead. It is a most unusual thing to discover lead poisoning, as the result of the use of badly glazed pottery vessels, in the population of the United States. This does not mean that there is no hazard from this source, and such official agencies as F.D.A., and such laboratories as our own, are engaged frequently in discovering such hazards. I repeat that they are

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infrequent in their occurrence. I reported 2 cases in the paper which you mention in your letter, simply because for once I was able to determine, within narrow limits of error in my estimation, the quantities of lead which were involved in inducing acute illness in two persons, under identical circumstances. Incidentally, you might be interested in knowing that some persons in attendance at this symposium, who assumed to know much more about this matter than I did, considered my interpretation of this incident to be wholly absurd. This, I think, was one of the most thoroughly stupid reactions which were manifested at this poorly planned and amateurishly conducted symposium. As a person long and deeply involved in this field of scientific investigation and reporting, this was one of the most poorly organized efforts of enlightenment in which I have been involved in my lifetime.

If after examining this reprint (and letter) you have other questions to put to me, I shall do my best to answer.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

RAK:wb