File
Monsanto Chemical Co
Nitro

March 3, 1952

William H. Riholdaffer, M. D.
United Mine Workers of America
Welfare and Retirement Fund
Post Office Box 1313
Charleston, West Virginia

Dear Doctor Riholdaffer:

This is in reply to your letter of February 27, concerning the dermatitis problem at the Monsanto Chemical Company, Nitro, West Virginia and the feasability of having the United States Public Health Service conduct a survey for control of the problem. I presume you are referring to the cases of dermatitis arising out of the so-called explosion that occured at this plant in March, 1949, the same which was brought to our attention in July, 1949.

This Department, through our Bureau of Industrial Hygiene, has been working very closely on this problem from the very beginning. This case was originally called to our attention by your predecessor, Dr. J. T. Morrison and the United Mine Workers of America District 50 and UMW. Since that time we have worked very closely with Mr. Charles Neal of UMW District 50, the Workmens Compensation Commission and the Monsanto Company.

At the very outset we contacted the chief of what was then the Division of Industrial Hygiene, United States Public Health Service for advisory consultation on the dermatological aspects of the problem. The Division of Industrial Hygiene accordingly had Dr. Paul Campbell, chief of their dermatological service come to West Virginia and visit the plant with Mr. Malloy of our own Bureau of Industrial Hygiene. Dr. Campbell confirmed the cases as a type of chlor-acne and made several recommendations in a report to this Department dated August, 1949. Following that our own Department made exhaustive studies and as a result of all concerned working on the problem, the exposure was brought under control. This I believe is borne out by the fact that no new cases have developed from this particular operation for quite some time.

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The problem now as I see it is not one of making an official survey for the purpose of making appropriate recommendations for the control of the problem as suggested by the Public Health Service. This I believe has been done in the particular case and the lesser cases of dermatitis from other sources can and will be handled also by this Department. The problem instead, is one of obtaining an adequate evaluation of the effects of the original exposure on the workmen and proper medical treatment to correct or alleviate these effects. It is my understanding that to date some of these workmen have been sent to the Cleveland Clinic and the Kettering Laboratory for observation and special diagnostic tests. It is my further understanding that the results of these tests are being made available to the Occupational Disease Medical Board of the Workmens Compensation Commission.

We have always worked very closely with the United States Public Health Service and their Division of Occupational Health has always been most cooperative. I am not of the opinion, however, that a survey and recommendations for control such as you indicate they have suggested would be of any particular value at this time. To my thinking it would be needless duplication of work already done. On the other hand, if the Division of Occupational Health is in a position to offer assistance in clinical diagnosis of the cases, which certainly have developed far beyond that of chlor-acne, and in recommending treatment in addition to that already offered by the various specialists, then by all means we would welcome such assistance.

In the meantime, if you have any new evidence indicating that new cases are developing from this particular operation or if you have any other specific cases of exposure this Department is willing to be of every assistance possible.

Sincerely yours

M. H. Dyer, M. D., M. P. H.
State Director of Health

NHD/PDH/fcb

cc: A. G. Hammer, M. D.
Seward Miller, M. D.
Donald J. Birmingham, M. D.