

January 20, 1958

Mr. Manfred Bowditch
Director of Health and Safety
Lead Industries Association
60 East 42nd Street
New York 17, N. Y

Dear Manfred:

Replying now to your various letters of recent weeks, which among many others have had to wait until I could free myself of some more immediate demands on my time, I take them in reverse order of their receipt.

The announcement of your Conference on November 6th and 7th 1958 has given me a chance to write up these dates in my engagement book, and unless something utterly unavoidable should interfere, I shall be there. I'll be most interested in seeing your program.

The further information in your letter of December 31st, on the lead-painted water tanks is, I may say, no great surprise to me, in some respects. I think it fair to say that there has been quite a lot of discussion of matters of this type behind the scenes and in relation to personalities and to opinions that were based more on emotional than on technical factors. For this reason, in my further consideration of the matter, I shall undertake to lay aside everything but the facts. I think that Elkin's experiments, so far as they have gone, have been quite satisfactory and definitive. I believe that they will have to be extended a bit, and because of the general nature of the situation, which has been muddled up, I believe, by some of the work done under the sponsorship of the USPHS, the Service will have to take a proper hand in this.

I do not mind saying to you that I would prefer some other coating than a lead-containing paint for water tanks, on general principles, and I think such a coating should be sought and developed by appropriate research, but, on the other hand, if this is a good technical procedure, and if it results in a negligible degree of contamination of water, there is no reason for inveighing against it. As I have indicated previously, on satisfactory evidence, the present standard of 0.1 mg. of Pb per liter of water is too high, and moreover there is no practical necessity for such a standard. That, however, is not necessarily relevant to this discussion. There is no doubt in my mind that this standard should be cut in half. Even then it is higher than it need be for the practical purposes of supply, since concentrations of the order of 0.02 mg. per liter are rarely found in

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our current urban water.

In any case, this matter will have a complete airing and I should think that the specifications for the care and maintenance of water tanks are in for some codification and tightening up.

The Riker advertisement attached to your note of November 8 was duly noted. I have done my best to change the views of some of their people, and I think I can say fairly, that at least one of their responsible people disagrees with me in principle and not for a commercial reason. At any rate, I have done what I could with them, and I shall continue to do what I can in the education of doctors. Beyond that, I can't be bothered, although I shall attempt to keep informed. Your help in this regard is appreciated.

Going back to September 13th, and the hypothetical hazard of lead in the air of cities from automobile exhausts, I have been pretty well "in the know", and usually in advance of publications of a variety of kinds, on this subject, by virtue of the fact that most of the people who have worked on any aspect of the problem have written to me from time to time. Miss Tufts is no exception. (Incidentally, we have more data on this matter than does anyone else at present.) She wrote to me fairly early in their work, and she may do so again. I certainly have undertaken to keep the lines of communication open. I think it proper to say that her findings have been obtained by generally satisfactory methods, and that this work, continued, may disclose some very interesting and useful facts. Some systematic observations are being made elsewhere, and such investigations, properly conducted, are likely to be productive. There are a number of aspects of this problem that need elucidation, and I call your attention to the fact, which you may or may not appreciate, that the "ghost of this alleged lead hazard" has not been, and cannot be, laid until (1) the increase in the use of lead for this purpose has ceased, i.e., until an equilibrium has been reached between the discharge of lead from this source into the atmosphere, and the capacity of the atmosphere to dispose of such discharges (by dilution as it is influenced by all factors of air movement): or (2) until a procedure of removing the lead from the exhaust (stopping it at its source) has been developed and applied. This question was not answered in 1926, nor could it be. We are put to the necessity of measuring man's intake of lead from all sources in his environment, from time to time, and seeing that it does not exceed a maximum figure. We now have a pretty fair idea of what that maximum intake from all sources may be. (Incidentally, I am sending you a copy of a more or less popular discussion of this subject in Los Angeles last year. If

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you have not seen it, it may be of interest, and perhaps of use to you. There are some other technical points to be considered which could not be dealt with for this audience, but the coverage is fairly satisfactory)

To return to Miss Tufts' paper and her discussion, little fault can be found with the work which she reported. The fault lies in her opinion of the meaning of her findings in terms of human health. This can best be disposed of by saying that she should have had better judgment than to express any such opinions, since she lacks entirely any background that would entitle her to formulate an opinion, much less to express it publicly. There is nothing you or I can do about this, and because of certain things in Miss Tufts' personality, it is best not to attempt to influence her views on these matters - certainly not by any overt act or criticism. Accordingly, on discussing this situation with others, who, like yourself, were interested in this matter, I advised (and obtained agreement to my advice) that no effort be made to criticize her or to combat her views, letting the matter die in the news, as it has, rather than creating an issue to be defended.

This matter, in short, is like the drivel that finds its way into the public press daily, or at least, frequently, through interviews, quotations and interpretations. If you or I bother with them, we shall be spending our lives, as Don Quixote, fighting windmills, and only giving the disturbed air another stir. I am not one bit concerned by these flea bites, since the means of obtaining satisfactory evidence of the true situation in this matter has been in my hands for these many years, and since a plentiful supply of information is available with which to demonstrate the facts to responsible people.

With kind regards, and my best wishes, tardily but truly, that this bright new year will bring you nothing but good things.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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Encl: The behavior of Lead in the Human Organism in relation to Community Life by Dr. R. A. Kehoe

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