

March 22, 1967

Katharine R. Boucot, M.D., Chief Editor
Archives of Environmental Health
Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania
3300 Henry Avenue
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19129

Dear Katharine:

In addressing you as "Chief Editor," I have a reason, but I wish also to address you as a person, an enthusiastic and warm-hearted person, whom I am pleased to know, and to whom I can, I think, speak frankly. If I err on the side of being critical in so doing, I crave your indulgence, for I have no wish to inflict any wound.

Several things in your letter of February 27 disturb me, more on your account than mine, but even more in relation to your responsibilities as Chief Editor. I shall speak further of these matters, but I want to go beyond them to your letter of February 13 addressed to Victor Sussman, of which he sent me a copy. I commented on your remarks and those of John Goldsmith, in a letter to Mr. Sussman, and I enclose a copy of my letter so as to keep the record straight between you and me. (I am sending Dr. Goldsmith a copy of this same letter.)

To begin with the most important matter, I had to take exception to your letter for several reasons, the principal one being my concern on valid professional and scientific grounds for the setting of a precedent in this country with respect to a standard of quality of air in relation to its content of lead. The issue here is not what you seem to believe it to be, but is rather one of being as nearly correct as is possible. The elucidation of a criterion of safety here is not ten to twenty years away but rather one or two. Moreover, in the absence of any valid reason for urgency, with respect to the ambient air, any haste to be the first to set a standard would be an expression of empty pride, rather than a sober professional performance. I do not believe any such pride has motivated Mr. Sussman and his Advisory Council. Rather, they have a problem which they are attempting to meet by this means. I have merely given them some good advice toward their purpose. This was done in good faith and on my considered professional responsibility. Your remarks about my suggestions, without having examined what I said in a formal statement, were irrelevant and clearly indicative of a misinterpretation of our work and of my purpose. I must conclude that you do not believe what I have said about lead in the ambient air, and that you do not trust my judgment in this matter. Why, I wonder, do you suppose I have spent years of my life in examining this problem, only to attempt to mislead responsible people in governmental agencies. Do you think, as Claire Patterson has claimed, that I have become a partisan of the lead industries against the true interests of the public? I find it difficult to believe that you have any actual doubt about either my motivation or my understanding of these matters, but there is, in fact, a lingering uncertainty in your mind on both of these counts because I have been attacked, criticized and doubted by others, and

especially by Dr. Patterson. Not being expert, that is, easily familiar with the subject, as you, yourself, have said, and not having considered the physiological significance of our experiments, nor having examined the voluminous evidence with minute care and professional critique, you are uncertain as to who may be right. This is not a remarkable situation, nor is it one for me to complain about. That is not the basis of my criticism. Your uncertainties as a physician in this matter are one thing. Your pronouncement as Chief Editor of the Archives of Environmental Health is quite another matter. Here, despite any denial of intent that you may make, speaks a voice of considerable authority. Such authority, for the sake of this distinguished journal, should be exercised only in situations in which you can speak from the strength of evidence. In this situation you spoke out of lack of acquaintance with the available information, and solely on emotion - an emotion which I respect - your pride in your State, your deep concern for the public weal, and your obviously strong feeling for the proper public position of our profession, but nevertheless an emotion, which in this instance was aroused in the wrong cause.

My advice to you - for that is what it is - is sanctioned to some extent by your urging that I "use my tremendous experience and authority to provide leadership - - - - - to maintain satisfactory air quality." I cannot but wonder what you think I have been doing, all of these years, as an investigator, practitioner and teacher of medical students, of graduate students in occupational and environmental health, and of public groups. Certainly I have not remained silent. On the other hand, I have undertaken at all times, even in private conversation, to remain faithful to scientific and professional critique, and to stick to the facts. I have certainly not misled the public.

But it was not my primary intention to explain or defend myself at this or any other time, or to enter into a discussion of the proper public and professional policies in relations to air pollution. Rather, it was and is my purpose to make clear to you that I had to take exception to your interpretation of my position in relation to the efforts of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in setting a standard for lead in the ambient air. I would not like to offend you personally or professionally, for I value you personally and professionally. I respond heartily to your warmth of feeling for people. There is no substitute for it in personal relationships, but it does need to be kept under wraps at times, especially in certain activities and judgments of physicians and other advisors and leaders of the people. We are supposed to know what we are talking about when we speak professionally. Otherwise we should, I think, maintain a discreet silence or, at least, a carefully balanced position.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

P.S. Incidentally, I am not too anxious to review Charlie Hine's paper, but I shall do so if you ask me to. While being generally true in spirit, it was crude in its expression, and of dubious value at this point in time.

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