

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
PHILADELPHIA

LABORATORY OF HYGIENE
D. H. BERGEY, M. D., DIRECTOR PRO TEM.

October 4, 1930

Dr. Robert A. Kehoe
Laboratory of Applied Physiology
College of Medicine
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dr. Kehoe,

Thank you for your letter of October 2nd, and the complete manner in which you have expressed your views upon the subject of what I regard as the private work of the Bureau of Mines.

I am in complete agreement with you upon the amount of work which must be done to protect the public from new materials of unknown physiological effect, but the duty to have this work done rests with the manufacturers. The cost of such work should be a part of the cost of introduction of every new material. I do not see that it is proper for the government to do this work for the manufacturer, particularly when the latter does not pay the full cost of the investigation. As I understand it, the government contributes the time of the staffs of the laboratories, and all overhead expenses, the manufacturer paying only for actual materials used, which is always the smaller part of the cost of investigation.

I have no criticism of the Bureau for doing the Tetra Ethyl Lead work, nor for the Methanol work now in progress, save that these two investigations do much to establish what I consider the bad precedent of accepting payment for doing work in the public interest. Of course, even in these two cases, the primary duty was on the manufacturer to see that the materials were safe before offering them for sale, but since the manufacturers evaded this duty, the Federal government was justified in investigating.

It is very much a question the reliability of publications of the government concerning such work financed in part by private parties. Not that any false information is published, but that all the information obtained is probably not published. No one who understands one-tenth of the devious activities of politicians can believe that the Bureau of Mines is free to publish all its findings. I have yet to hear of a case where the Bureau of Mines has published information condemning any material which it has investigated. This seems strange, in view of the number of materials which it has worked upon. I believe that the private laboratories are freer to publish their findings than the Bureau of Mines, although the latter uses complete publication as an argument justifying its private work.

What you say about the poor compensation of government employees applies with equal force to University teachers, at least

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Of course I have nothing personal against any of the men who are doing the work I complain of. Some of them I count among my very good friends. I have told members of the staffs of both the Bureau of Mines and the Public Health Service of the efforts I am making to stop the work I complain of, and have assured them that there is no personal implication at all. I have no doubt that if such work were stopped, these men would have plenty of opportunity for productive work still before them.

I hope you understand that, although I am writing on University stationery, the views I express are my own. I am primarily concerned with this matter through the private laboratory of myself and my son. I realize also, that if my efforts are successful, this private laboratory would receive only a very small portion of the work which the government laboratories are now doing.

With kindest personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Henry Field Smyth
Henry Field Smyth

KE 0007402

October 2, 1930

Dr. Henry Field Smyth,
Laboratory of Hygiene,
University of Pennsylvania,
Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Dr. Smyth:

I should have answered your letter of September 15th earlier, but since your letter took me by surprise I have delayed answering it and have given some considerable thought to the understanding of your point of view. However, I have been quite unable to see any soundness in your position. I do not believe the work which the Bureau of Mines has done can be regarded as private work, and I believe that it is distinctly a proper and a very necessary governmental function. With the introduction into common use of many of the modern chemicals, problems of great importance to the public health are arising. It is imperative, it seems to me, that these problems be investigated as carefully and as accurately as possible. I believe this to be a governmental function which should grow rather than diminish. Furthermore, if government agencies can develop a point of view in industry whereby materials, the use of which is contemplated, can be examined into and either convicted or acquitted of danger before their use and distribution, a tremendous contribution will have been made to preventive medicine. We need investigation before the fact rather than after. There are only a few laboratories which are properly equipped to do this kind of work, nor do many of these hold the complete confidence of the general public. Then too, if it is necessary that governmental agencies act in public health matters, I fail to see how they can act wisely without assuming the responsibility for the accuracy of this type of investigative work. I am heartily in sympathy with their attempt to do this, and I could wish nothing better than that it might be developed more and more. Considering the number of unsolved problems of this type, I see no reason why there should not be plenty of work for everyone who is interested.

I am speaking bluntly in this matter because I feel deeply. It so happens that my own experimental work is almost entirely dependent upon the support of industrial concerns. Despite this fact, I am not willing to discourage the development of a good quality of experimental work anywhere in order to safeguard the financial backing of my own interests. If my laboratory can survive and obtain support for itself on the merits of its work, I shall be happy. On the other hand, if it loses such support to persons who can demonstrate their ability to do better work, I shall regard it as a perfectly natural consequence.

Furthermore, there is another point of view in this. Government experiment laboratories have in them men who have genuine scientific interests. Laboratories cannot exist without such individuals. On the other hand, the Government does not adequately support their work. Consequently I have every sympathy for my scientific colleagues working in governmental laboratories who are able to do work of such quality that they can interest industrial groups in bearing a portion of the expense. That they should have the scope of their work limited through our action is almost unthinkable.

The regular workers at the Bureau of Mines, so far as I know, have not received compensation for their work, but have merely accepted funds with which to defray the necessary expense of their experimentation. I have been partly responsible for two of such investigations. One of these had to do with the public health aspects of the use and distribution of Ethyl Gasoline, while the other was one which you mentioned, namely the study of the toxicity of dichlor-difluor-methane, for the Frigidaire Corporation. The Corporations in these two instances supplied a considerable sum of money for the carrying out of these two problems, this money having been spent in purchasing animals and in providing the necessary equipment. Certain additional technical assistance was also employed. In these two instances I was very much pleased that it was possible to interest the Bureau of Mines in the work. If I had known a better or more trustworthy laboratory to which to submit these problems, I should certainly have used my influence in placing the work in their hands. Even so, I might not have been successful in influencing the Corporations in this matter, for their principal interest was in obtaining information which the public as well as other scientific men would be willing to regard as entirely unbiased and authoritative.

I agree with you in believing that a government laboratory should be working on matters which have to do with the public interest. So too should University laboratories. In fact, the latter has the greater reason in tradition and ethics for sticking to the study of principles rather than to their application according to the particular needs of the moment. I doubt if government scientific workers should be personally compensated by Industry for work of this sort. Government officials apparently also feel that they should not. But adequate salaries should be provided by the Government. One knows, however, that such men are compensated even less well by the Government than are men of similar ability in the universities, which fact makes it rather embarrassing for us to state too convincingly a principle which might have an undesired effect. I think the public interest is involved in the case of most of the compounds which are used in

industry and distributed to the public, and I do not believe that all of the experimental workers combined will be able in our life time to give us the necessary amount of information about materials which have been and now are quite generally distributed. This is not even mentioning the large number of things which will certainly find further use in the future. I should find myself very hesitant about doing anything which would discourage the development of information along this line. As to whether any field of scientific or practical work is by right the property of the University or a private laboratory, there might be a considerable debate. I cannot but feel that such right must be proven pragmatically by test of quality and productivity.

I trust that what I have said above will not give any offense, for I distinctly wish to be impersonal. However, I feel it proper to make my own point of view perfectly clear. I have taken the liberty of sending a copy of my letter to Dr. Howe, as expressing an opinion which opposes that which he has previously received.

With kindest personal regards.

Sincerely yours,

RAK:EJ

KE 0007405