

ETHYL CORPORATION

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

TO Dr. R. A. Kehoe ADDRESS Cincinnati

FROM Mr. O. B. Lewis ADDRESS New York

SUBJECT Tank Cleaning Accident - DATE January 15, 1945
Continental Oil Refining Company
Artesia, New Mexico

I, too, am concerned about the tank cleaning accident at the Continental Oil Refining Company at Artesia, New Mexico. The questions brought out in your letter of January 5, 1945 are very similar to those which have been troubling me.

A study of the somewhat conflicting reports which we have on this case confirms at least the two serious mistakes in judgment which you mention. I cannot understand our representative permitting men to enter the tank, which he pronounced not thoroughly clean, without full protective equipment.

There is evidence, however, from a description of this tank cleaning job that the tank might justifiably have been declared thoroughly cleaned, since apparently all of the material had been removed and a condition created which normally would have permitted the tank to be pronounced safe for entering from the standpoint of lead. However, steaming, and the factor of the broken bottom would seem to introduce certain imponderables. I believe that we cannot afford to overlook the possibility that lead poisoning occurred from some such factor or factors on which we have no exact information. Possibly you do have, through Dr. Schradin's report, or as a result of the analysis of material.

Your statement that it is not altogether an unusual practice for men without suitable protective equipment to be permitted to enter tanks that have not been pronounced thoroughly cleaned comes to me as a complete surprise. Certainly nothing that we have said or implied from this office would condone this procedure; furthermore, a cursory study of our tank cleaning reports does not support this viewpoint. If such a condition exists, it has come about without my knowledge and in spite of the emphasis that has been placed on this point at almost every opportunity when discussing the subject of tank cleaning with Division personnel.

Despite everything that has been said and written, this apparent instance of lack of sound judgment is profoundly disturbing. I agree with you that a letter should be written to the field outlining the circumstances of this accident and emphasizing anew the responsibility that our Safety Engineers must assume. A draft of such a letter is attached, and I hope you will alter it as seems fit, and return it to me for issuance.

You mention certain unusual features of lead exposure in this case, and that in Cincinnati you are now analyzing data that has been collected. I should appreciate an opportunity for discussion with you and possibly, if you concur, with Dr. Schradin, since he has first-hand knowledge of this accident. If you agree, I should like to come to Cincinnati at an early date convenient to both of you.

Yours very truly,



O. B. LEWIS

WB

Att: Draft of Circular Letter