

February 11, 1975

Lawrence E. Blanchard, Jr.
Executive Vice President
Ethyl Corporation
330 South Fourth Street
Richmond, Virginia 23217

Dear Larry:

Thanks very much, indeed, for your letter of February 7 and especially for the transmission of the opinion of the court. It is certainly gratifying to be confirmed on one's judgment. I have not read the entire decision, for I cannot read with sufficient ease to do so. I have, however, read enough of it to know the reaction of the majority of the court to the primary issues.

I feel it wise at this point to mention what I believe to be the principal difficulty in the situation. I shall wish to discuss this with Doctor Zavon, unless you disagree with me. The problem is, in this situation, that no one knows the outcome of the issue. There is no place in the government for the prevention of uncertain evils. The actual issue is what happens. Some of us think we can anticipate, but there is always doubt here. And, unfortunately, when the worst actually happens, it is likely to be disastrous. When, on the other hand, some people believe, erroneously, that the worst has happened - that is when people come to believe that the issue in this instance (the illness of children with lead poisoning due to the effects of the use of leaded gasoline), we begin all over to deal with the entire problem. Now here is a real dilemma. The poisoning of children with lead (a real, significant fact) has been dragged bodily into this issue by misled, would-be scientists, and we shall continue to have childhood urban cases of lead poisoning (fatal cases, often) which have nothing to do with leaded gasoline. How we deal with this error is a mystery, for the press will, innocently enough, present this matter as fact, and play up the liability. However, this can be dealt with, because it must be.

There is yet another problem. Some element of carelessness is beginning to creep into the operations of the overseas groups. This, if it progresses, will result in cases of serious (possibly fatal) cases of lead poisoning within the operations of Ethyl. This would seem to have little relevance to the main business of Ethyl. But times are changing in this respect, and it will be necessary to eliminate occupational illness of a serious type, if one wishes to persist in business activities. This sounds like the gospel of perfectionism, but it is not. We simply must perform well (almost perfectly), if we are to be trusted to operate at all. Too many people are involved in dangerous trades in modern times, and this issue must be dealt with realistically.

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Well, these are some of my thoughts at this time. Ethyl Corporation seems likely to develop in the U.S.A. I am, naturally, elated by the result of this suit, but I am fully aware that a hornet's nest has been created by the inquiry, and that the situation can never return to its original situation. I believe that we can survive and grow, but I also believe that we must do our job almost faultlessly.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

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