

August 9, 1954

Mr. L. B. Hitchcock, President
Southern California Air Pollution Foundation
704 South Spring Street
Los Angeles 14, California

Dear Mr. Hitchcock:

I have been slow to reply to your letter of July 29th since returning to my desk, because of the numerous things that have required my attention. No delay has been occasioned in the performance of the work agreed upon however, since Mr. Cholak is on his way to initiate the analytical work according to our verbal agreement.

The additional matters which might be included in the agreement, as outlined in your letter, will give us some difficulty, but we shall do our best to comply with your wishes. I shall merely point out the difficulties and leave their disposition, in the formal agreement, to your judgment and phraseology. Meanwhile, pending the execution of the agreement, the work will go on, unless you feel, on receipt of this letter, that we are seriously at odds with each other. I suggest that neither of these matters need to be included in the agreement in any detail, but that we agree informally on these details.

In the matter of the monthly billing, we can send you a monthly statement of the cost on our books for which we should be reimbursed currently. We cannot provide you with a precise account of the actual expense involved because of the necessity of calculating certain costs from the records of the University. These records never reach us on time, and there is no present means available to us of obtaining this precise information, although we can estimate it closely. This will mean that the final bill will include certain minor adjustments required to bring our books into agreement with those of the University, as these relate to our financial operation. If this will meet your requirements, we shall be able to comply with your request.

The prospect of our furnishing you with analytical reports several times weekly fills me with utter dismay for a number of reasons; first, because this is not feasible; second, because it could not serve any useful purpose if it were feasible; and third, because such a procedure is very likely to create serious difficulties for both of us. I shall discuss these points in some detail, but let me say that, despite the discussion, we shall supply you with information currently, as it appears to be useful and pertinent. We shall make every effort, therefore, to help you in what we recognize to be a difficult task.

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As to the feasibility of such reports, I must point out that the analytical work on the materials forwarded systematically from Los Angeles will have to take its normal sequence in competition with other samples from other sources. The clinical and medico-legal work of the Laboratory always takes precedence over other analytical work, for obvious reasons. This does not mean that the work on the Los Angeles samples will drag out over a long period of time, but it does mean that we cannot grant the urgency of the schedule as it relates to these samples. It will take its normal course. This will mean that telegrams containing results several times weekly would be an absurdity, a mere sound and fury without meaning.

As to the usefulness of fragmentary results to you or to anyone else, I can only say that neither you nor anyone else dare draw conclusions from them until sufficient numbers of data have accumulated to achieve validity. Such data will not come to hand even once per week, at least, in the early weeks of the investigation, much less several times per week.

I am much more concerned, however, by the potentialities for difficulty, which lie in the examination of dribbles of data and in speculation about their meaning on the part of even the most cautious and best informed investigators. Taking the matter of lead in the atmosphere as an example, there is in the literature a figure of about 40 (I believe it is 42 but I shall not stop to check) micrograms of lead per cubic meter in the Los Angeles atmosphere. This is an utterly unconfirmed single result, obtained I believe by a somewhat gullible, and certainly an inexperienced observer. It found its way into print in what can only be regarded as an act of scientific irresponsibility. It is quite unimportant except as an example of naivete.

The present situation in Los Angeles is full of dynamite. As it relates to the components of the atmosphere, it does not need publicity, but careful-meticulously careful, patient search for the truth. We do not wish to have our day to day efforts scrutinized, publicized or interpreted for us. We are a responsible investigative organization - responsible for the precision and pertinence of our investigations and for the interpretation, on the broad background of our experience, of our work, in the first instance. If anyone can make something more or less of our data than we can, it is all right, but we wish to interpret them ourselves, so far as we can, before submitting them for criticism or interpretation. I just cannot see these analytical results publicized or even susceptible to such a procedure without a shudder. If we are not careful we shall be involved in a controversy over them before they are available.

I realize that I am putting the worst possible construction on your

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request for these data, that you are not likely to be pleased by my remarks, and that the situation which I envisage is not likely to come to pass under your direction of the policies and activities of your staff. Nevertheless I am talking about a principle, and am protecting the integrity of this organization, which has had more experience with situations of this type than any other research organization in the country. We regard our data as our own until we are ready to release them. Therefore, I suggest that we report our results to you in due course and form, as we believe them to be sufficient in number and meaning to be useful in the portrayal of facts with reference to the Los Angeles atmosphere. This will save us time, trouble and expense, but more importantly, it will preserve you, as well as ourselves, from errors of judgment and performance, and from the assumption of responsibilities which neither we nor you are in position to accept.

I trust that I shall have made my position clear without being objectionable, and without appearing to be difficult to deal with. We are in the habit of trying in every way to understand and to meet the requirements of our sponsors, clients, or patients, without compromising our own policies, and I should not wish to be wanting in that respect in my dealings with you. I hope therefore that we can find common ground on this issue.

Sincerely yours,

RAK:vr

Robert A. Aehoe, M.D.

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