

November 24, 1945

Mr. Earle W. Webb,
Ethyl Corporation,
Chrysler Building,
New York City 17.

Dear Mr. Webb:

I am very glad to give you my opinions on the general subject of cancer research in relation to the petroleum industry. Also I am expressing my reaction to the relationship of this general problem to the affairs of Ethyl Corporation, for what it may be worth to you.

It has long been known that certain bituminous products have rather striking cancer-producing properties when applied to the skin frequently or regularly. Thus the tar cancer of the wool spinner, so well known, particularly in England. Other materials of highly complicated chemical structure associated with certain high boiling fractions of petroleum compounds have been shown to be active in this regard. It appears that materials of this kind occur with considerable frequency in the products of catalytic cracking. Whether the variety and quantity of these is greater in connection with catalytic cracking than in the case of thermal cracking has not been definitely established, but this is a question that requires an answer. In any case, there are a number of reasons for suspecting that some of the higher boiling petroleum products now on the market have more striking carcinogenic properties than the corresponding products of an earlier period. Considering the number of persons who may be involved in whatever hazard may exist, it seems highly desirable that this matter should be investigated thoroughly. Some of the technical people in the petroleum industry are concerned about this problem, and a number of the medical people as well. It is my opinion that once investigation has been started it will have to be carried on rather extensively in order to answer the questions that present themselves. Skin cancer is, of course, only one aspect of the cancer problem, and not by any means the most important. Nevertheless a thorough investigation might well result in discoveries of very considerable importance in relation to the general problem. This is a matter of considerable importance to the entire community therefore, and is worthy of the best efforts of investigators. The petroleum industry can certainly justify extensive expenditures in this field of medical investigation.

From the point of view of Ethyl Corporation the line of interest is not so direct. One reason for this is that there is no present

KE 0001146

Mr. Earle W. Webb - (2) - November 24, 1945

suspicion attached to gasoline, insofar as carcinogenic properties are concerned. On the other hand, the interests of Ethyl Corporation are so obviously intermingled with those of the petroleum industry that it would not seem difficult to justify some reasonable contribution in the furtherence of cancer research. The cause is a worthy one. It involves the entire community to a very considerable degree. Therefore, as somewhat of an outsider, and certainly not as a special pleader for medical research, I can see such a contribution as a gesture of good will and as a tangible recognition of Ethyl Corporation's interest in the ills as well as the advantages of the petroleum industry.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

RAK ef

KE 0001:47