

November 15, 1960

David E. Price, M.D.
Assistant Surgeon General
Chief, Bureau of State Services
U.S. Public Health Service
Washington, D.C.

Dear Doctor Price:

On March 3rd, I wrote to you about certain questions which had to be dealt with in connection with the distribution and use of tetramethyl lead, and on April 1st, I received your reply.

As it has turned out, my suggestion for the settlement of one of the matters in question was not entirely carried out, and it seems advisable to inform you as to what has occurred. I have very little doubt that your view of the matter will coincide with mine, but wish to make sure that there is no lapse in our communications. If there should be any difference in our view, I should like to know of it, quite apart from any official or legal consideration.

The point involved is that of the warning signs on pumps or containers. After writing to you, I polled the three groups for suggestions concerning the wording and found that they had reconsidered and had concluded that the substitution of "Lead Alkyl" for "Lead Tetraethyl" would confuse rather than inform persons who would take the trouble to examine the sign, since this was an unfamiliar technical term. I recognized the validity of this, and agreed that the following form of sign would be more useful:-

1. FOR USE AS A
 MOTOR FUEL ONLY
 CONTAINS
 LEAD
 ANTIKNOCK COMPOUNDS

This was agreed to by both manufacturers of the antiknock compounds. Meanwhile, however, some reorganization of the California Company was occurring, and their plan for the commercial exploitation of TML had gone forward at great speed. I had no reply from them at once, and when they replied I found that they had gone ahead and had procured a year's supply of a sign designed as indicated below, on the assumption that the wording would prove to be satisfactory:

2. FOR USE AS A
MOTOR FUEL ONLY
CONTAINS
LEAD

Meanwhile Ethyl Corporation had procured a supply of signs like #1 above.

In my opinion this is not a matter of earth-shaking importance. I would prefer that all of the signs be uniform, but so far as I can see, either of these is satisfactory, and I have so expressed myself. I saw no reason to impugn the good faith of the people on the West Coast, and I consider that there was nothing to justify an effort on my part to get them to scrap their signs and to purchase new ones. This letter does not represent a request for an expression of the opinion of yourself and your associates, but is rather intended as information. I should welcome any opinion you may care to give, especially if you should consider my position to be unsatisfactory for any reason.

I shall continue to keep you informed of any matters of consequence in connection with this enterprise. In line with that intention, I would like to let you know that one of my associates (I was abroad at the time) met with the State and Territorial Officers in their meeting in San Francisco, at my request, and informed them of the developments in this respect. By this means all of the States have been made aware of the situation.

You may also be interested to know that members of the staff of this Laboratory, with representatives of the industries, have worked out a plan which we believe to be satisfactory, whereby we are monitoring both the environmental conditions and the possible responses of personnel thereto, in all of the occupations that seem likely to give rise to exposure to tetramethyl lead in the course of its distribution. Thus far the results are entirely reassuring, but the work is only at the half-way point.

We have also visited the health authorities in all of the countries of Western Europe and have discussed the problem and presented the available information concerning it to these people. There may well be inquiries directed to the Public Health Service from some of these countries, and if so, you will be aware of our activities in this regard. Certain other countries have also been visited by representatives of the Associated Ethyl Company Limited (London, England) and I have been fully informed of all of these activities. I believe that the household is in good order, and that there will be a minimum of difficulty over this new development. The situation in Switzerland is such that gasoline containing tetramethyl lead cannot be distributed there until appropriate action is taken by the government. A governmental Commission, having issued a report on tetraethyl lead (confirming our findings for local consumption), is in no hurry (understandably) to take any further action, and so there will be

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no commercial activity in this country for some time.

If there are any matters in this connection about which you require information, in addition to what I have supplied or may supply in the future, I trust that you will not hesitate to call upon me.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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