

August 21, 1933

Mr. Glendon A. Schubert
Auto Body Service
Foot of Wawbeek Avenue
Tupper Lake, New York

Dear Mr. Schubert:

Your letter of August 16th inquiring about the symptoms of lead poisoning from Ethyl Gasoline, addressed to the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation has been referred to me for reply. I and my associates in this Laboratory have been investigating the possible dangers which might arise from the use and handling of Ethyl Gasoline during the entire period in which it has been in use, that is since 1924. I have no doubt you will be re-assured to know that during this period of years there have no cases of lead poisoning associated with the handling of Ethyl Gasoline, despite the fact that for a certain period of time no precautions were taken by any persons who were engaged as either filling station employees or garage mechanics. There can be no question, therefore, that quite a number of men have handled Ethyl Gasoline in a careless manner and have used it in precisely the way in which you have recently employed Essolene. It would seem, therefore, from this evidence alone that the dangers associated with the handling of gasoline containing small quantities of lead are not very great. Our investigations of the past eight years have substantiated the lack of lead hazard associated with the handling of such gasolines, and although filling station employees and garage mechanics are still advised to handle Ethyl Gasoline carefully, and although they are warned not to use leaded gasoline for cleaning or for other purposes than that of motor fuel, the conclusion is justified that there is very little danger associated with the use of such gasolines for any and all purposes. In studies of large numbers of men who handle such gasolines we have shown that the absorption of lead from this source is negligible and not measureable. Moreover, the leaded gasolines such as Essoline which are not sold under the name of Ethyl Gasoline, contain smaller amounts of lead than do the premium fuels known as Ethyl Gasoline.

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For these reasons I do not believe that you need have any anxiety about your health from the point of view of lead poisoning. It is highly improbable that you have absorbed appreciable amounts of lead. The symptoms which you describe are associated with a variety of conditions, and indeed they are not unusual during or following periods of hot, muggy weather. I would advise that you ignore these symptoms of fatigue. If, however, they continue or progress and especially if they are associated with a loss of weight, it would be the better part of wisdom for you to consult a physician not with the idea of recognizing lead poisoning but with the idea of determining just what your physical condition is in relation to any one of a number of chronic infectious processes.

Replying somewhat more directly to your questions as to what are the early symptoms of lead poisoning, it should be said that one would not expect the symptoms of lead poisoning from the handling of Ethyl Gasoline to be different in any way from lead poisoning developed in other lead trades. However, since I repeat that there have been no cases of lead poisoning from the handling of Ethyl Gasoline, it becomes apparent at once that it is not possible to describe this condition in any other than in terms of lead poisoning in general. There is no one symptom or combination of symptoms which are characteristic of lead poisoning alone. Thus it requires a careful and painstaking examination and chemical tests to establish with any certainty the existence of early lead poisoning.

If the above discussion does not answer your questions satisfactorily and if you wish to obtain any further advice from me about your general health, I should be pleased to have you write me. Meanwhile, I should suggest that you make it a practice to use gasoline which does not contain lead for your shop work since such gasolines have no advantage for your purpose, and since thereby you will spare yourself any anxiety as to lead absorption from this source. In order to obtain such gasoline in the present market, you should make it a point to avoid all colored gasolines and purchase a water white gasoline. It is only in this fashion that you can be sure that the gasoline you employ does not contain lead, benzol or various other un-necessary and perhaps toxic substances.

Very truly yours,

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Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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