

P. Sanders
September 5, 1956

MEMORANDUM WITH REFERENCE TO ALLEGED CASE OF FATAL
LEAD POISONING CONTRACTED DURING TANK CLEANING
(SAN PEDRO, CALIFORNIA)

Summary of L.D. telephone conversations with Dr. Earl W. Doty and
Mr. M. Littlefield, Regional Manager, Western Region, Ethyl Corporation:

A contract had been let by the U.S. Navy for the cleaning of a
large underground storage tank to the Ship Service Company of San
Pedro, California, where the tank was located. Cleaning operations
were carried on by a crew of seven men and had been under way for
about three weeks (approximately August 13 - 31). On Thursday or
Friday (August 30 or 31), one of the workmen became ill with severe
stomach upset and vomiting. He was admitted to the Harbor Guild
Hospital, San Pedro on Friday, August 31, 1956, where he died very
shortly after admission. The provisional diagnosis was Possible
Hydrocarbon Poisoning. An autopsy was performed at the County morgue.
Presumably tissue specimens can be obtained for chemical analysis if
there is any question about the pathological diagnosis. However, an
article appeared in one of the Los Angeles newspapers on Monday or
Tuesday (September 3 or 4), stating that a workman had died from
lead poisoning contracted during the cleaning of a gasoline storage
tank in San Pedro.

When I talked with Dr. Doty he was advised to examine the other
tank cleaners, and to take the usual blood and urine specimens, as
well as to obtain if possible suitable tissue specimens from the body
of the deceased tank cleaner. Incidentally, the insurance carrier
for the tank cleaning contractor expressed concern as to whether
lead poisoning actually was the cause of death, and whether it might
be present in the other members of the tank cleaning crew as well.

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The cleaning operations had been carried on under the observation of a member of the safety group of the Ethyl Regional Office.

It was reported that all precautions had been carried out, and that the workmen had been supplied with full safety equipment. There was apparently no evidence of carelessness or other infractions of the safety regulations.

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