

REPORT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY DIVISION*

Manfred Bowditch, Director

Rather than risk boring you with detailed statistics of activities, I will say only that the health and safety work continues to show a healthy growth (there has been an increase of at least 50 per cent since its inception) and will give a few examples illustrating its more important phases.

CHILDHOOD LEAD POISONING

Because of the difficulty of its solution and the great amount of adverse publicity which it engenders, childhood lead poisoning has continued to be a major time-consuming headache. A recent news item in the New York Daily News with the headline "Lead Poisoning Killed 10 Kids in Brooklyn in '55, Highest Toll in the City," is a typical example of the latter. Through our responses to the inquiries of physicians, hospitals and clinics, the sponsorship of research, and cooperation with such organizations as the American Academy of Pediatrics and American Medical Association, I believe that we are securing a better understanding of this problem and more reasonable attitudes towards it.

INDUSTRIAL LEAD POISONING

Although the recognition of lead poisoning as a disease dates back to antiquity, and despite the fact that its causes and control are well understood, yet, as Dr. Kehoe has told us, there has been a diminution in the severity of industrial cases, rather than in their total number. This is illustrated by the fact that inquiries and case reports continue with little change in the annual total. A primary need here, as Dr. Johnstone said yesterday, is better instruction of our physicians.

INDUSTRIAL MEDICAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

There is gratifying evidence of a greater recognition of the importance of adequate medical and health services on the part of the larger companies. Two examples of this have been an inquiry from a non-member company as to a physician suitable for appointment as over-all medical director, and a recent request from a representative of one of our members for advice in setting up a company-wide health program.

TREATMENT OF LEAD POISONING

The so-called EDTA therapy for plumbism, brought forward five years ago, is by far the greatest advance in this field in recent times. It continues to be a subject of intensive study, and a report of recent findings will shortly be mailed to all of our members.

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Report of Manfred Bowditch

LEGISLATION

8 We continue to watch legislation adverse to the interests of our members. Three bills this year, two in New York and one in New Jersey, having to do with lead paints, were killed in committee. Two New York bills on air pollution have been re-committed for study and copies of a substitute draft bill prepared by the Associated Industries of New York State have been mailed to our members in that state. Because of the impossibility of keeping a close watch on 48 state legislatures, it would be most helpful if our members having installations in other states would notify us of adverse legislation coming to their attention.

UNIFORM LABELING

The trend towards more and more precautionary labeling regulations continues. Our effort here has been mainly to secure reasonable and uniform labeling requirements for lead compounds in all federal and state jurisdictions. This has been quite successful to date, with the elimination of objectionable wording from a labeling requirement of the U. S. General Services Administration the most recent episode. Modification of the New York City lead paint labeling regulation was secured by means of American Standard Z66.1, prepared by a committee of the American Standards Association, sponsored by the Lead Industries Association. The futility of the labeling approach has been brought to the attention of health officials in other large municipalities and appears to have caused them to reconsider any such plans.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PLASTIC PIPE REPORT

8 Getting wind of a forthcoming report on the suitability of plastic pipe for potable water supplies in preparation at the University of Michigan, we arranged to see the galley proof of the report and, through contacts with members of the advisory committee on the report, were able to secure elimination of a number of statements adverse to the use of lead stabilizers. Copies of the report, expected this week, will be mailed to those of our members known to be interested and will be available to any others on request.

ALLEGATIONS AS TO SOURCES OF LEAD POISONING

Experience has convinced us that no theory as to the causation of lead poisoning is too crazy to be brought forward. No matter how absurd such a theory may be, it can find its way into print, and from then on is almost certain to be regarded as gospel. Dr. Johnstone has mentioned several of these wild notions. In conclusion let me emphasize one of these and cite three additional and very recent ones:

8 A group in Los Angeles had put forward the claim that lead from the exhausts of motor vehicles constituted a menace to the public health. They were very vocal and went so far as to hold sizable mass meetings. We have secured figures on the lead found by official agencies in the street air of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Cincinnati and other major cities, have found that none of these concentrations remotely approach a hazardous level, and have brought this fact to the attention of municipal health authorities and others, whereby it is believed that this ghost has been laid.

8 A letter from a Washington physician, received in March, stated that "Ingestion of newspaper has been the basis of lead poisoning in three of our more recent cases." His reference was to plumbism in small children. In reply, we pointed out that

there is no lead in newsprint, and none in the ink with which newspapers are printed. Our request that he explain the source of the lead in these cases brought no response.

It would be of some interest, if it were so, to know that the eating or drinking of lead paints has become a favored means of committing suicide. Such we would have to conclude to be the case from a tabulation received from the American Public Health Association, showing eleven cases of attempted suicide, one of them successful, during 1955, by means of ingesting lead paints. Here we have a respected and important national organization, publisher of the American Journal of Public Health, putting forth a seemingly utterly absurd item of vital statistics. When we questioned this, the reply was that "it might be a clerical error." It quite obviously was.

Perhaps the craziest of all was a letter from a physician in Alabama, reporting in detail on the case of a housewife thought to be suffering from lead poisoning, alleging a urinary lead value some ten times that found in severe industrial cases, and suggesting that the patient's habit of biting off silk thread, while sewing might be the cause. Because of the association of this physician with an organization overseen by one of our leading industrial medical friends (and one blessed with a sense of humor), these theories were brought to the latter's attention and elicited the understanding and amusing reply from which, in closing, I will quote, with minor changes:

"Anent the case of Mrs. X concerning whom the words 'lead poisoning' have appeared.

"We are suggesting to Doctor Doe that the Health Department be requested to make an investigation to determine if possible whether Mrs. X has been ingesting lead from sources in the vicinity of her home. Should this prove to be the case, perhaps it can be stopped with these sequelae:

- a) Mrs. X would feel better;
- b) The hospitals would be relieved of dozens of admissions in addition to the dozens she has had;
- c) Our organization would be relieved of the necessity of continuing to pay hospital and physicians' charges through ensuing years;
- d) The clinicians, the Public Health authorities, our organization and the Lead Industries Association would all emerge triumphant for having had a part, and Mrs. X, we hope, along with all the others will happily live forever after."