

Personal and Confidential

April 4, 1938

Dr. Graham Edgar
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New York City
New York

Dear Graham:-

I saw Dr. Sayers in Washington on Saturday morning and had a very profitable conversation with him. I find that his attitude toward the entire problem corresponds almost precisely to my own. First of all he has the same feeling about the present situation of the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation that I have, namely that after something like thirteen years of experience, the public health problem related to Ethyl Gasoline in its present form is substantially settled, and that the position of the Corporation in this respect is quite sound. He feels that any change which would result in an increase in the potential hazards to the public health would reopen the entire question for examination, in which case there would be no period of experience to point to as evidence of safety. He feels that the Corporation should be unwilling to jeopardize its present position for any other than the most urgent reasons. Sayers expressed himself as believing as I did that leaded gasoline as now distributed, has given no evidence that it is any more hazardous than is gasoline without the addition of lead compounds. As to the experimental program which I outlined as underway, Sayers expressed his complete and enthusiastic approval. He stated, however, that for the protection of the Public Health Service and also for the protection of the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation, he felt that it would be necessary for the Public Health Service to carry out certain investigations on their own, and his idea ran something like this; that by spring of next year we should probably have the information available in the case of the Dayton Power and Light Company group. On the basis of this information, granting that a necessity for a change existed, a new program of distribution might then be put into effect in a limited area of the country; in this area both his group and ourselves might undertake the experimental observations for the purpose of determining whether any unforeseen difficulties might arise as the consequence of practical usage of the product.

This strikes me as the most intelligent program in which the Corporation might engage. I believe that a period of a year, at least, would be necessary to enable us to visualize the practical difficulties associated with the manufacture of the new product and with the blending of it with gasoline and with the distribution of such gasoline for public consumption. During such a period observations within a limited area could be carried out in such a way that we should not have to depend upon conjecture or the judgment of any one person or group of persons. Some time ago I should have been a bit more skeptical as to the advantages of investigative work of this kind done by the Public Health Service. At present, however, I am satisfied that this would be done well.

I spent the greater part of the morning in Sayers' laboratory with Fairhall and various other men who are working there on lead problems. You will be interested in knowing that Fairhall was very cordial indeed, and his associates were most gracious and apparently delighted at an opportunity to discuss our considerably broader experience in relation to certain aspects of their work. They are working now with spectrographic methods which are only at slight variance with those originally described by Cholak, and with a full appreciation of the excellence of Cholak's work. Fairhall himself is working with a modification of the Dithizone method which is similar in some respects to the method published by Hubbard. Both he and his associates are familiar with Hubbard's work and tend to regard it as very nearly the last word in accuracy in dealing with this method. I am very glad that this situation has straightened itself out for I must confess that I had a certain anxiety over the practical consequence of the kind of feeling that existed between Fairhall and myself in any such controversial matter as the public health aspects of leaded gasoline. I do not mind controversies too much, but I should not wish to be a party to a controversy which involved this question too deeply in personal feeling.

Sayers further expressed himself as being quite appreciative of our cooperation in bringing this matter to his attention at this early date, and although I am quite sure that he will wish to work entirely independent of this laboratory, still I am sure that we have established a basis for mutual understanding which will give him the benefit of our experience and which will give us the benefit of his critical judgment and especially in relation to the necessary attitude of a government agency.

It occurs to me that it would be wise for us to get together with Earl Bartholomew and Calingaert at a reasonably early date as to the precise program of our cooperative work in Dayton. Bearing in mind that I shall be abroad, in all probability in June, our preparation for carrying on our observations under these conditions should be set up at an early date. I leave this matter in your hands for such conversation with Bartholomew and Calingaert as is necessary, but I shall wish to be completely conversant with what they expect to do in order that I may suit our own observations more advantageously to the conditions which will be established.

I have not written to Mr. Webb as to the results of my conversation with Dr. Sayers, and I trust you will take care of that for me. If there is anything in what I have said above that is not entirely clear in your mind, please let me know and I shall be glad to discuss it with you further.

Sincerely yours,

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Robert A. Kenne, M.D.

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