

LEAD INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION, INC.

222 MADISON AVENUE

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

TELEPHONE - AREA CODE 212

OR 9-2000

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM--1964

Don G. Fowler

Director of Health and Safety, Lead Industries Association, Inc.

Since our ordinary activities in Health and Safety follow a routine of answering questions, inquiries, attending meetings, etc., and since a good many of these activities are listed for you in the Association's Quarterly Reports and commented upon for you in Mr. Ziegfeld's Annual Report, we thought at this time that it might be instructive to outline in greater detail several unusual situations that came to our attention in the past year. Accordingly I would like to discuss three items in greater detail than is ordinarily possible in our Quarterly and Annual Reports. First, one of the more famous T.V. shows, then a discussion of a certain university professor and finally an outline of a new positive action program that we are starting this year.

The Ben Casey T.V. Show--October 30, 1963

T.V. portrayals of physicians are ordinarily not of great interest to me but this particular show was headlined as a solution to a lead poisoning problem in industry so I watched. It turned out to be one of the most obnoxious programs I have ever seen, although the examination by Dr. Casey of the "lead poisoning problem" was more juvenile than obnoxious. The show portrayed the company doctor in a really vicious manner all the while inferring that American business firms would condone shabby and unethical medical practice. As a matter of fact the entire show was a travesty on the way a modern American business is conducted in that all of the employees in the small shop shown were supposed to have lead poisoning and yet the company doctor refused to admit it, told them they had headaches and stomach aches, and hid this bad situation from the Board of Health and other government authorities. Then of course Ben Casey discovers the situation and rides to the rescue of the poor downtrodden employees by exposing the company doctor, confounding the company lawyer and outwitting the management. To me it was a comedy--although a tragic one--since Ben Casey was entirely wrong in his explanation and diagnosis of lead poisoning and equally wrong in his understanding and portrayal of modern American business. The show made me wonder, again, in what world the Madison Avenue script writer lives who seriously portrays a company which hides, or even attempts to hide, from its union, from the government and from its own physician a poisoning situation as serious as this particular one was supposed to be.

We here at the office considered that our best approach to the network and T.V. station (ABC in this case) would be through the medical profession. I could not locate any physician by phone who had watched the program but all were equally shocked, with me, when I outlined the program content to them. In order

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to stir up some action I wrote to the President of the Industrial Medical Association outlining my thoughts in the matter and requesting their cooperation in bringing this matter to the attention of responsible authorities. This is what happened. In the February 1964 official Journal of the Industrial Medical Association, the President, Dr. John Morris of Eastman Kodak, wrote an editorial from which I would like to quote. "In a Ben Casey show on television on October 30, 1963, a 'company doctor' was portrayed in a 'particularly and unnecessarily villainous manner'. I'm quoting Don Fowler, Director of Health and Safety of the Lead Industries Association, who first brought this to our attention. Since the AMA caduceus proudly rests among the credits for this program' to quote Don Fowler again, we have asked Henry Bove to use the influence of the Council on Occupational Health to prevent such a thing in the future. Personal letters from you to the program director of ABC-TV will also help."

As a result of this editorial the American Medical Association and the Industrial Medical Association assembled a committee of competent physicians to a private screening of this T.V. show, in order to plan a method by which future programs of this type can be screened and corrected before they are shown. These discussions between the medical profession and the T.V. industry are still in progress and as far as I know a mechanism for review of such programs has still to be established.

Lead in the Ocean

A professor in the Department of Geology at the California Institute of Technology has expanded his interest in recent years to include the ocean. This particular professor has also become an expert on nuclear plumbology which is a fascinating specialty that takes advantage of the omnipresence in land and sea of three isotopes of lead. Since these three isotopes of lead have equally well-known precursors in the atomic scale, it is possible, by means of delicate and extremely sensitive measurements, to determine the ratios of the three isotopes, and their radio-active precursors in soils, rocks, etc. These measurements can be made so accurately that a nuclear plumbologist can tell us how old a piece of rock is or the age of a gallon of water in the ocean. It is interesting to know that these are the men who have given us the exact age of the earth--all done with lead. In other words, lead is, and has proved to be for them, a most valuable tracer element, far more versatile and important than radioactive carbon. Now here is where we come in. In making his measurements of rocks and soils and in waters the nuclear plumbologist expects to find lead everywhere and so he does; but recently he has found what he thinks is too much lead in the ocean. Apparently the professor became genuinely alarmed and decided that he had to find out where all of this lead is coming from, and it was at this stage of his cogitation that he remembered our industry is selling lead for gasoline and that this leaded gasoline is used in cars and trucks and, therefore, comes out of the tailpipes of these cars and trucks, is spread into the atmosphere and from the atmosphere drops into the ocean. With this simple chain of events at his mental disposal the professor was able to explain in a satisfactory manner how 500,000 tons of lead every year drop into the oceans of the Northern Hemisphere. As Bob Ziegfeld said when he first heard these fantastic "facts", here is the world's best lead mine and all for free.

When we looked up the publications in which these articles appeared we find they are respected; we find that the professor, Dr. Patterson, is respected

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in the scientific community; and of course we know that his university has an unsurpassed reputation in the world of science. So we decided to talk to Dr. Patterson and give him the benefit of our knowledge about the subject of lead. I found Dr. Patterson to be a sincere and dedicated scientist whose measuring techniques for lead are beyond reproach and whose laboratory and equipment cannot be matched anywhere in the lead industry nor, for that matter, in any other university. However, Dr. Patterson, in his dedication as a scientist concerned with the broad problem of public welfare, feels that it is his obligation to notify everybody about this problem and that is what he has done and is planning to continue to do. As you might expect he and I had a serious discussion and I questioned his assumptions that all of the lead that goes into the gasoline comes out of the tailpipes and reaches the ocean every year, particularly when at the time of his report we were using a grand total of 170,000 tons of lead in the gasoline sold in this country. He had made his estimate of the 500,000 tons by assuming run-offs from rivers and rainfall as explanation for the difference. It was no use my pointing out to Dr. Patterson that our own industry and that the Federal government through the U. S. Public Health Service has made literally thousands of measurements of the lead content of the atmosphere and that these measurements are uniformly low, lower than any level which would be physiologically significant, and that therefore his interpretation of his own data was probably in error. I further pointed out that using his own data the lead level in the oceans is about one hundred times less than the amount permitted in drinking water. I must say that after spending four hours with Dr. Patterson we parted in a friendly manner but he had not convinced me and, unfortunately, I had not convinced him. His constantly reiterated position is that lead should be removed from gasoline immediately so that we stop poisoning all of the people in America.

We have not heard the last from Dr. Patterson. This summer he journeys to Greenland where he heads an expedition which will drill into the Greenland icecap to find two-hundred year old snow which he will then analyze for lead with the intention of proving that two-hundred years ago the lead level in snow was much less than it is today. Our plans for Dr. Patterson include a meeting between him and Dr. Kehoe in which Dr. Kehoe will present to him the facts of life concerning lead physiology and present public exposure to lead. It will be interesting to follow this discussion.

Report on New Lead Information Program

At its December meeting last year the Board of Directors approved a proposal by our advertising agency to prepare printed material covering the use and abuse of lead in present-day industry and every-day life. Many of our members have in the past suggested to us the need for a positive action program of this kind which could seize the initiative and present information favorable to lead to the medical profession and others who are interested and concerned. When I say favorable to lead I do not mean to imply that we intend to be anything other than objective in our presentation of information but that we will present facts in a complete and rounded manner so that medical decisions can be made on the basis of knowledge rather than ignorance.

The first objective of this program, which is now in high gear with G. S. Tyson writers busily abstracting and collating information on lead toxicology, is to reach selected members of the medical and public health professions in this country. I say in this country although our European friends are following

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our progress with a great deal of interest and have asked to be kept informed of our progress here because they are anticipating and are already running into problems of a nature similar to those with which we are faced here. As we all know, there is a great deal of information on lead toxicology present in books and articles in the scientific and medical literature, and it is from this source that we are abstracting the material for our first publication. This publication will include a concise statement of the presently known facts about lead toxicology and the application of these facts to the industrial situation, that is the protection of employees; to the public health field where the problem of childhood lead poisoning is recognized; and to the air pollution and water pollution situation as it now exists.

Our basic philosophy in this endeavor is to let the facts speak for themselves, and to put the facts into the hands of those opinion makers who can best use them to obtain for lead a fair hearing in the public press, and in the minds of the general population. As you know we find this necessary because of the great amount of ignorance that exists today about lead in the medical and public health professions, an ignorance that is most likely due to the lack of time on the part of these professions in keeping up to date. Our publication is designed first to lay a factual groundwork in the knowledge these professions should have about lead and aid them in their daily activities and, in later supplements, to keep them abreast of current developments. Our plans include mailing the basic piece of literature, which will be ready for printing shortly, to a list of several thousand key people. From time to time after this and as it becomes available we will furnish these people and others with supplemental items of a specific nature, always strictly factual and accurate, to help keep them informed. Other mailings and material will be made to selected newspaper editors in the field of science to help combat specific situations as they arise, and to provide a general background for their interpretation of news items. We have great hopes for this whole program and feel that if we maintain a coverage of scientific literature and abstract from it pertinent material we will be in a position to influence the important people in the field of medicine, public health, air and water pollution and those segments of the press which deal with these matters.

General Comment

From these activities which we have just outlined for you I would like to point out that our whole approach is designed to integrate the Health and Safety Program of the Lead Industries Association with the ILZRO Research Program, by initiating research activity in areas where facts are lacking and needed, through our memberships in various professional and technical societies, making valuable acquaintances with key members of the societies in the medical and public health professions and to assemble all of these facts, and to make use of all of these acquaintances in a general educational effort.