

RUTHERFORD T. JOHNSTONE, M. D.

Brockman Building
520 West Seventh Street
Los Angeles 14, Calif.

May 18, 1955

Mr. Manfred Bowditch
Lead Industries Association
420 Lexington Ave.
New York 17, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Bowditch:

I have your letter of May 16, 1955 together with a copy of the letter to you from Mr. Brian Taylor of the Broken Hill Associated Proprietary Limited, Melbourne, Australia. Mr. Taylor's communication states that the Federal Government has been asked to legislate against the manufacturing of paint containing more than five per cent soluble lead. The request is made by an Organisation of the Blind.

My reaction to the above requested legislation is that a similar request could be made by associations representing cripples, nephritics or dyspeptics and for better reason, namely, if lead intoxication is present, intestinal colic is frequent, nephritis much less frequent and so with wrist drop.

Optic neuritis was reported as resulting from abnormal absorption of lead many years ago in Europe where modern industrial hygiene was not practiced. Dr. Alice Hamilton states "optic neuritis has rarely been reported in the United States." Those cases that have been reported are due to an industrial exposure which occurred in the early part of this century and (again) before good industrial hygiene was existent.

The legislation (if not in existence in Australia and it undoubtedly is) should be directed toward the manner and conditions of exposure. In my opinion optic neuritis would not occur under ordinary use of any standard paint on the market. In twenty years of a medical practice entirely limited to clinical industrial toxicology I have never seen a case of optic neuritis occurring in any type of exposure to lead. Furthermore, even the commonest type of lead intoxication, lead colic, is now exceedingly rare in painters.

For the above reasons I feel the request for the aforementioned legislation is unwarranted.

Yours very truly,

/s/ R. T. Johnstone, M. D.
R. T. Johnstone, M. D.