

January 30, 1958

Dr. Earl A Irvin
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3000 Schaefer Road
Dearborn, Michigan

Dear Bud:

John Phair has told me of his brief conversation with you (under somewhat less than favorable circumstances, it seems) about the interest on the part of the automobile manufacturers in certain aspects of the air pollution problem. Since I am not certain what you had in mind, and also since we have been interested in this situation for some time, as it relates to the automobile industry, it seems wise to find out from you what we might do about it, and also to tell you something of my views and interests in relation to the affairs and activities of The Kettering Laboratory. I should tell you, I think, that I have talked over some of the aspects of this matter with John M. Campbell of the G.M. Research Staff, with the idea that we would bring our talks to the attention of the group concerned with the problems of the industry generally. To what extent he has done this, I have no knowledge. In any case, this will serve to let you know that this is not a new problem to me.

As you may be aware, I have cultivated our relationships with responsible people in the automobile and petroleum industries, not solely with the idea that these relationships are good for the Kettering Laboratory and the U. of C. Institute of Industrial Health, but that they were good for industrial health, medical education in that field, and the industries concerned. It has been my belief and policy, that an activity such as ours, should have its feet and its professional interests soundly established in industry, on the one hand, and in this University (and the university tradition of public and professional responsibility), on the other. Our experience has shown me that this is possible and that it is good. Since our future depends upon research in the major fields of industrial health either directly (in industrial stress, hazard and disease), or indirectly as industry creates problems of public health (air and water pollution etc), I hope that we can maintain ourselves as effective investigators and advisors to the industrial organizations that have financed our operations in the past; and who, alone in the degree that they find it useful, can continue to finance it in the future. This requires a certain nucleus of fairly long-term investigations (for professional and financial stability) and a continuing crop

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of problems of lesser importance or duration. Above all, it requires the utilization and development of personnel and facilities capable of handling virtually any problem that may arise, with appropriate effectiveness. Toward these ends we have been striving since 1930, and with a reasonable measure of success. We have tried therefore to visualize some of the needs of industry before they have become too large and too serious to handle, and to look a bit into the future of the hygienic problems that would seem to beset an industrial society.

Certain aspects of the problem of air pollution have been on our minds for years, and certain of these have been under study for years. I need not go into what we have done or what we are doing, but the point is that we are equipped by experience to investigate environmental conditions and human responses to them. As an example, fairly comprehensive knowledge of the occurrence and the sources of lead in the environment, including the atmosphere, and our extensive knowledge of the behavior of lead in the human body, cover the problem of contamination of the air with lead in a very satisfactory manner (although there are still things to be learned). The work of John Phair and his associates on the epidemiological side of the human response to non-specific types of air pollution, and that of Frank Princi and his group on the respiratory physiology of this situation, plus the analytical approach of Cholak and his group to the composition of the atmosphere, have provided not only information, but also a sound grasp of methods and their limitations.

Because of these backgrounds, and because of the obvious relationship of automobiles and their exhausts thereto, I have felt that we should be busy, on at least a modest, but certainly a continuing basis, investigating the responses of human beings to a number of materials other than lead, which are being discharged from automobiles. To me it is very nearly imperative as the automobile people investigate engines and fuels and the nature of the waste products that escape from the tail pipe, as a means of knowing where they are going technologically that they should also develop comprehensive knowledge, no less necessary to their future developments of the physiological effects of these discharged wastes. The lung cancer problem is an example. If any important part of the increase of this disease is due to automobile exhausts there is a tremendous threat to the industry and a mandate to deal with it technologically. So long as doubt and apprehension exists on this score (and there is growing doubt and apprehension) the industry has great liabilities and it needs to know what to do to avoid them. This can be found out. It will cost money, but there are now ways of approach and other possibilities which should be under exploration. The cancer problem is only one of many, and when this great industry neglects these, it runs great

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risk, in my opinion, not only of incurring an avalanche of unpredictable liabilities, but also of being justly accused of irresponsibility in the matter of the public welfare. I confess that I have a selfish interest so to speak, in the future of this Laboratory in this relationship, but it is an interest which recognizes that our usefulness to this and to other industries lies in our realistic concern with these problems, our appreciation of their difficulties, and our ability, from time to time, to give unwelcome, but sound, advice, concerning things that are in the offing. I, and several of my immediate professional associates, have an increasing concern about this group of problems. We believe that they are destined to plague our cities in particular, and that public concern is very likely to result in ill conceived and highly troublesome legislation, to which the only alternative is a knowledge of the facts that will point the way to appropriate action on the part of the industry concerned.

This concludes this letter which you may think to be unduly long and perhaps tiresome. It has seemed to me, however, that I would do well to acquaint you with my attitude toward the entire matter, as a prelude to asking you what you may have had in mind in mentioning it to John Phair. I would welcome your suggestions, in any case, but what I wished you to know is that I am not much interested in anything but a fairly long-term systematic and stepwise, but fairly comprehensive, program of investigation of certain basic problems. Certainly, we would undertake to be responsive to the wishes of the industry, but in the long run we would expect to attack the basic problems, and not be sympathetic to the idea that a "quick and dirty" or a "crash" type of investigation can be expected to yield anything but a fragment of information.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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