

October 27, 1936

Mr. T. H. A. Bevan
Ethyl Export Corporation
Thames House, Millbank
London, S. W. 1
England

Dear Mr. Bevan:

There are a number of matters on which I expect to write you in the near future and on which some definite point of view must soon be developed. However the purpose of this letter is to call your attention to what we are doing here on a problem which has recently given us serious difficulty.

You are well aware that for some time we have been a bit anxious about the current methods of cleaning tanks that have been used for mixing and storing leaded gasoline. There have been a number of cases of poisoning and recently there was one such more serious incident which resulted in three fatalities among seven acutely poisoned individuals. The facts are not quite clear as to why these cases should have been so acute and because the facts are not plain, we are making a thorough-going investigation of the whole matter which will extend through a period of the next several months. There are certain reasons for believing that under unusual conditions concentrated Fluid may be allowed to penetrate both the gasoline layer and the water layer in a storage tank, and may thus lie under the water layer until such time as the tank has to be cleaned. Obviously when such a tank is cleaned, the workmen may have serious exposure to liquid lead compounds in addition to the dusty decomposition products of tetraethyl lead. I do not intend to discuss all of the possibilities or suppositions in this letter, but we hope to have the facts available as the result of our observations here and we should then be able to do what is necessary to solve this problem even if it seems taking the whole matter of tank cleaning under our supervision essentially. It is quite apparent here that the mechanism of putting into effect the instructions which we have issued on this subject has been unsatisfactory. Obviously we can not afford to allow a procedure so intrinsically dangerous to be loosely and carelessly handled. On the other hand, it would be foolish to undertake a program of caring for the matter without knowing more about the details of the problem than we do at the present

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Mr. T. R. A. Bevan (cont)

time.

I do not feel entirely easy about this question and I wish I were in position to decide immediately just what we should do about it. Since this is impossible without the proper information, I have chosen not to attempt anything outside of this country for the present. On the other hand, I believe it would be very useful in view of the difficulties we have encountered here if you would take such steps as seem feasible to bring this matter to the attention of all the responsible people within the field of your activity, calling their attention to the instructions which have been issued and to the necessity of precautionary measures such as we have outlined. I believe the instructions which we have issued are adequate to cover the most serious difficulties. It may be that we shall have to give more attention to the avoidance of dangers due to the presence of liquid lead compounds in the mixing tanks. There are a number of problems in this whole matter which I would like to have a chance to discuss with you in detail, but for the present I think we shall have to be satisfied with doing what we can to see that the present regulations are actually effective, or as effective as they can be made through present avenues of approach.

We have recently set up an organization within the Corporation for giving special attention to matters of safety. From time to time you will undoubtedly hear from Oscar Lewis who is the chairman of a Safety Committee which will certainly be working under our instructions in large measure. I hope the organization will work out effectively, but it is somewhat experimental at present. I see no present necessity for extending such an organization beyond the United States and Canada although I have no way of telling just what the program may be thought of in this connection in the New York office of the Corporation. However I suggest that you let me have your reaction to what I have said in the preceding paragraphs and also any information or suggestions which you may have received from New York. As you know, I am very skeptical of mere organizations as such and I think you will have to exercise your own judgment in large measure in the field of your own actions. I would appreciate it very much for my own information and guidance if you would write me rather fully when you have the time and opportunity as to your general point of view on a number of matters which may involve the organization or re-organization of our medical consultants' services, as well as any other facts which appear important to you.

I am writing Boldero a brief notation on the subject of the hazards of tank cleaning, and I think

Mr. T. R. A. Bevan (cont)

it would be wise if you were to discuss this matter with him rather fully at your convenience.

With kindest personal regards and with my best wishes for you and Mrs. Bevan,

Cordially yours,

RAK:is

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

cc Mr. Lewis