

Mr. L. W. Shank

Dear Lou:

Eastern Air Lines
Wing tanks.

This week I attended the FIRE POWER SHOW held for Eastern Air Lines at Miami by our Mr. Bill Rusher. Mr. Rusher holds a very fine meeting and is to be complimented on his work. At the Monday morning meeting some 200 key men of the Airline saw the presentation including Mr. Iickenbacher who was so enthused by the meeting that he asked that it be put on for the employees of his repair shops at Miami where some 3,000 are employed. This was done with a very good turn out.

While there they found out that I was the safety engineer for this territory so they asked that I sit in on one of their safety meetings where they have a problem in cleaning and repairing the wing tanks of thier big ships. These tanks hold 1200 gallons of gasoline. The tanks have to be entered for bucking rivets and believe me it is a real problem since the manhead is only about 18 inches in diameter. Inside the tanks there are wing struts which makes it even more difficult. They should be using midgets for this job.

When a ship is in for repairs the tank is emptied and then blowers are used on it for 24 hours or until it is gas free. The Union then claims there is a thin film of sludge on the aluminum plates that they think is lead. They of course wipe this up but the men still think it is dangerous so management let them the kind of mask they wanted so a mask with oxygen bottle attached was selected. Because of the confined sections in the tank the mask has to be removed in going from one section to the other.

Since the space is so small the men wear very little clothes since they make it harder for the men to move around. Air is blown into the tank while the men are working this in addition to the mask they wear. Now the men on this job claim that they are getting skin irritation which they think will give them lead poison. I tried to point out that this was very unlikely if all sludge was removed. One of the men brought a book by Cantarow & Trumper published by Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore, Md. titled LEAD POISONING. They had read enough of this book until they were really afraid to go into the tanks. In this book Dr. Kehoe is quoted a great deal and also some of our safety regulations are shown.

I suggested that the tanks be steamed but that is impossible since a rubber compound is used on the seams. Management asked that I return the next time they have a ship open which is about every other week to take a lead in air reading in the tanks which I agreed to do.

The plant has a very good medical department in charge of Howard K. Edwards, M.D. Dr. Edwards thinks the Union is magnifying this problem so as to get more pay for this job. The shop steward made the statement if this was done he would have men clamoring for the job. I am inclined to agree with Dr. Edwards thoughts but think we should try to help them with this problem. I am wondering if this has come up with other airlines and have we ever had this elsewhere.

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