

MEMORANDUM WITH REFERENCE TO ALLEGED CASE OF FATAL
LEAD POISONING CONTRACTED DURING TANK CLEANING
(SAN PEDRO, CALIFORNIA)

Summary of L.D. telephone conversations with Dr. Earl W. Doty and Mr. M. Littlefield, Regional Manager, Western Region, Ethyl Corporation:

A contract had been let by the U.S. Navy for the cleaning of a large underground storage tank to the Ship Service Company of San Pedro, California, where the tank was located. Cleaning operations were carried on by a crew of seven men and had been under way for about three weeks (approximately August 13 - 31). On Thursday or Friday (August 30 or 31), one of the workmen became ill with severe stomach upset and vomiting. He was admitted to the Harbor Guild Hospital, San Pedro on Friday, August 31, 1956, where he died very shortly after admission. The provisional diagnosis was Possible Hydrocarbon Poisoning. An autopsy was performed at the County morgue. Presumably tissue specimens can be obtained for chemical analysis if there is any question about the pathological diagnosis. However, an article appeared in one of the Los Angeles newspapers on Monday or Tuesday (September 3 or 4), stating that a workman had died from lead poisoning contracted during the cleaning of a gasoline storage tank in San Pedro.

When I talked with Dr. Doty he was advised to examine the other tank cleaners, and to take the usual blood and urine specimens, as well as to obtain if possible suitable tissue specimens from the body of the deceased tank cleaner. Incidentally, the insurance carrier for the tank cleaning contractor expressed concern as to whether lead poisoning actually was the cause of death, and whether it might be present in the other members of the tank cleaning crew as well.

The cleaning operations had been carried on under the observation of a member of the safety group of the Ethyl Regional Office.

It was reported that all precautions had been carried out, and that the workmen had been supplied with full safety equipment. There was apparently no evidence of carelessness or other infractions of the safety regulations.

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