

*Information in weekly letter
in Black file*

Feb. 24, 1940.

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. H.C. Dees
Baltimore, Md.

Dear Claire,

I am submitting herein a report and history on the recent lead poisoning case at the Gulf Oil Corp. Terminal, Norfolk, Va.

The accident occurred while cleaning Tank #11 which is 25,000 barrel capacity. This tank was spiked with two drums of fluid in Sept. 1932. The emergency blend was made by Mr. L.W. Shank using a regular eductor set-up and at the completion of the addition of the lead the tank was turned over two times for complete circulation. This was the first cleaning since the spiking in 1932. Records show that at the time of the spiking the tank had about a 5 inch water bottom and since that time it has varied between 4 and 5 inches.

During the week of April 29, 1939 I contacted this terminal regarding their tankcleaning program and they thoroly understood that we were to be notified when this took place. In May 1939 we were notified that Jim Baldwin of the N.Y. Division had contacted the Gulf Offices in Philadelphia and left notification cards bearing my name and address so that we might be notified of any cleanings done in this division by the Philadelphia crew.

Mr. Houseman of Philadelphia was in charge of this tankcleaning and he had two regular employees a Mr. [redacted] and Mr. [redacted]. Five temporary employees were used three of which were white and two colored. The names of the whites were [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] and the colored Olds and [redacted].

Olds died prior to the time that Mr. Lewis was notified and [redacted] was in the hospital and still is. At present [redacted] is more than holding his own and expected to recover.

It is my understanding that [redacted] and [redacted] showed severe lead intoxication while [redacted] and [redacted] showed a mild case of lead intoxication. The three regular employees were negative. The entire medical angle of this case was handled by Dr. Willard Washle and additional information on this phase will have to be obtained from him.

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When the manhead was removed there was about 4 inches of water in the bottom of the tank and Mr. [REDACTED] entered wearing complete safety equipment including a blower type airline hose mask. He remained in the tank about an hour and shoveled out part of the sludge throwing this on the ground outside of the manhead. This sludge remained on the ground until the following day when it was buried. The following day the five temporary employees entered the tank wearing their regular clothes, boots and raincoats, but NO masks. They then washed down the tank with a fire hose and forced the remaining sludge to a sump where it was picked up by a centrifugal pump and discharged into the pit dug for the burial of the sludge. The overflow from this pit covered about 50% of the ground inside the firewall with a fine rusty appearing sediment. Although the pit was covered when we arrived the sediment still remained uncovered on the ground.

This sediment was regarded as a potential hazard and four hundred pounds of chlorinated lime was sprinkled over same. This was allowed to stand over night, during which we had a fairly heavy rain, and turned under the next day.

Conclusion

This accident occurred from gross negligence on the part of the Gulf Oil Corp. In the first place both the local terminal superintendent and the foreman of the Philadelphia crew admitted knowing that we should have been notified yet failed to do so and secondly both parties knew and understood our rules and regulations regarding tankcleaning yet disregarded same. I might also add that an enamel warning sign was placed on the manhead of this tank, along with four other tanks which had been spiked, in 1936 and our tankcleaning regulations were posted in the terminal office

I can assure you that this accident would not have happened had we been notified and I had been present to supervise the cleaning. In order to prevent the recurrence of this tragedy plans are being made to recontact all oil companies and again review the necessity of notifying us when tankcleanings are to take place so that they may be properly supervised.

Yours very truly,

John A. Cole.

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