

São Paulo, April 21st, 1938.

Dr. Kehoe
Kettering Laboratory
University of Cincinnati
CINCINNATI, Ohio.

Dear Sir,

A situation has arisen in Santiago, Chile on which I would appreciate your advice and comments: There has recently been enacted in Chile a decree requiring all concerns to have a thorough medical examination made of their employees. All employees found to be suffering from diseases or to be in bad general health must be given rest periods or time off as recommended by the examining Doctor. In compliance with this law the West India Oil Company had the examinations of their employees at their depot at San Antonio made by their newly appointed company doctor, Dr. Hernandez, a young wide awake man who has been practicing in San Antonio for the past 13 years. The examinations made by Dr. Hernandez included examinations of the blood and from these findings it was his conclusion and that of the laboratory which carried out the blood tests that three men were suffering from lead poisoning and some twenty five showed signs indicative of lead poisoning. The remaining men examined (38) showed no sign of lead poisoning. The two men engaged in blending Ethyl fluid were in the latter class, showing no indication of lead poisoning.

Two of the three men showing definite lead poisoning, however, were employed as drum fillers and storers for both leaded and non-leaded gasoline and in addition to showing lead poisoning had practically everything else a man can have and still be up and about. The third man has since left employment but when employed at San Antonio was engaged as general flunkie.

The doctor after making his examinations searched around for a source of the lead and concluded that gasoline which spilled on the floor on filling or leaked on the floor when the drums were being stored and also small particles of lead from the outside of the drum which were knocked off in rolling drums over the cement floor contributed sufficiently to the lead content of the dust on the floor to constitute a possible source especially as the method of cleaning was to sweep when dry with a broom. (He analyzed some dirt from the floor and found lead). And also since the men were in such bad condition they would be more susceptible than others in better physical condition. He therefore recommended that the two men be transferred to other work not suspected as a source of lead danger and that in the future the floor should be cleaned more often and with a hose first. Both recommendations have been complied with. In searching further he found some three blocks away a fenced in vacant lot in which some mining company had dumped some concentrates which they were unable to export and which he believes contains high percentage of lead. His recommendation was that if this was found to be true the concentrates should be removed.

The point as I see it of interest to us is in the fact that doctor Hernandez believes that there is danger in handling leaded gasoline and that he relies on blood findings to establish definite lead poisoning in the face of other complications.

Right here I should make it clear that I realize that a "little knowledge is a dangerous thing" and that perhaps Dr. Hernandez is correct on the latter point that blood findings are conclusive but from what I have read in your papers I gather that this is not entirely true and acting on this I took the liberty of

KE 0010525

25059

later date. He apparently received the papers in the spirit in which they were given and I do not think he got the impression that I was attempting to tell him his business. At least I tried to prevent conveying such an impression.

While in Santiago I made the customary inspection of the plant in San Antonio and found things in good shape and that they had complied fully with recommendations as to hot water heater, etc. made on my previous visit. As regards tank cleaning Bulk leaded gasoline is stored only at three points all under the direct jurisdiction of one man who personally supervises this work. He understands the precautions necessary and has the necessary equipment required to do the work according to recommendations. The same day I was shown around the plant. They manufacture their own five gallon cans and in the process do considerable hand and automatic soldering on rather antiquated machinery which involves a series of pots filled with molten solder in a large room with open windows but without forced ventilation. The thought occurred to me that if there was lead poisoning around this would be the place to get it as all modern machinery I have seen which use molten lead have a hood over the pot. For my own information I would like to know approximately the danger from such a source. I suggested to West India that they might get an opinion from their Medical Staff. I did not consider the above to be of sufficient concern to us directly to suggest that you have Dr. Cruz Coke investigate it - nor did I discuss the problem with him. Perhaps you will think it best to do so. If so and/or I can be of service please let me know.

I have as yet only made preliminary investigations and am leaving Rio tonight for São Paulo to discuss the plant and investigate the matter further.

A discussion yesterday with Dr. Soper (Head Rockefeller Foundation) with whom Mr. Webb and Dr. Machle talked when they were here developed that the State of São Paulo is short on the type doctors we are looking for and he was able to suggest some doubts but did not care to make any definite recommendations. His position there is a little uncertain as they more or less threw the Rockefeller Foundation out and now have their own Yellow Fever Control.

Considerable preliminary investigation will be required and I will keep you in touch with developments but before proceeding too far I would appreciate having your approval in principle of the suggestion that another doctor is required, of course contingent on your approval. It would perhaps expedite matters if you will cable your reactions care Standard Oil.

Yours very truly,

W. E. Roberts

KE 0010526