

June 10, 1925

Mr. C. C. Chesney
PITTSFIELD

Dear Mr. Chesney:

I know you will be interested in the attached report from Doctor Hamilton in regard to the Pittsfield Plant. I am glad to see the progress that has been made and haven't any doubt you have in mind bringing all of the work up to those standards.

Yours very truly,

GERARD SWOPE

GS:H



Pittsfield Manufacturing Plant - May 15 & 16, 1925.

This was my first complete visit to the Pittsfield Works, for in the spring of 1923, when an investigation was made by the Harvard group of physicians, my attention was turned only to the relatively small number of departments in which poisons are handled. The report which was sent by this group to the General Electric Company contained certain recommendations and suggestions with regard to specific features in connection with manufacturing processes and also more general recommendations with regard to the medical service in the plant. The specific risks consisted in the use of red lead in the manufacture of lightning arrestors, the use of benzol in some departments, offlead paint in spray form and the exposure of sand blasters and porcelain workers to silica containing dust. The more general recommendations concerned the organization for the care of the health of the employes, which was found to be inadequate and not based upon the principles of sound industrial medical practice.

In this visit I have tried to cover the same ground as was covered by the Harvard group two years ago. In general it may be said that there is a distinct improvement in the matter of industrial poisons and dusts. The lightning arrestor department is much better. The filling benches are now equipped with grated tops opening into suction pipe which draws down the dust. There is also suction at the spinning machine. The men who have the dustiest work, filling the pans from the bins and carrying them to the benches, do that sort of work only one day in the week. The floors are washed with the hose twice a day and although they are impregnated with red lead, they are not dusty. The benches, especially those on which the fillers stack their finished material, have too much red lead dust and should be cleaned oftener and probably with water. A new bathhouse is to be built, the present one

being considered inadequate. The management provides clean, washable union suits and overalls which are kept in a separate room and are laundered by the Company. The men in this department are sent once a month to Dr. Tracy at Hillcrest Hospital for examination and no case has developed, according to his report, for a number of months. I think that under this system it should be entirely possible to protect these men against anything but a mild and early stage of lead poisoning even though they are engaged in lead work which is distinctly more dangerous than the average.

Sublimed blue lead paint is sprayed by men who also are examined monthly for lead poisoning and who work with a sponge respirator to protect them from breathing droplets. Nevertheless, it would be better to apply the paint from a hose as is done in Erie.

Very little benzol is used. Formula 187 paint contains benzol, but it is used only in the machine shop where small parts are built.

A visit to the new porcelain works shows that there is very little danger there from breathing flint-containing dust. Only three men weigh and mix the flint for the body and glaze and work only about an hour a day at this job. The dust in connection with the finishing work is carried off by a very good exhaust apparatus. Dry sweeping at the end of the day is doubtless very dusty, but wet sweeping is impossible, because of the slipperiness and the sweepers are given respirators. They are planning to use vacuum cleaners. The exhausts for glaze spraying and for paint spraying are excellent.

There is much more danger of dust in sand blasting. This is done with the usual Pangborn equipment in a room with a slotted floor and exhausts and the men are obliged to work in the room for it is said that the castings are too large to permit of using the Fort Wayne closed chamber with the turntable. They are experimenting with

the Burrell mask with which they are very favorably impressed. It would be a great improvement if they could introduce the shot blast equipment which is used in Erie and Schenectady, instead of the sand blast and the hydraulic method of shaking out castings, which was devised in Erie. Whether this is feasible or not I am quite unable to say. At present the men from the sand blasting department are examined monthly and at the end of six months they are shifted to other work, even if the doctor's examination has revealed nothing in the way of a lesion in the lungs. This seems to me rather drastic, and I hope to see the system supplemented by one which does away with the source of trouble, the sand dust.

In commenting on the medical service it must be said that our report of March, 1923, still holds good. It is still true that the problems of industrial medicine and hygiene deserve more serious attention than they now receive. Although much thought and care has been given to accident prevention and to the general welfare work, such as education and recreation, a more extensive and effective organization of medical service should be introduced. Surgical care for minor and major injuries seems entirely satisfactory, but no attempt is made to deal with illness or to carry out a program of preventive medicine, except in connection with the periodical examination of the groups of employees mentioned above.

The so-called emergency hospital is lamentably small and inadequate. It consists of three rooms only. The first is a waiting room for men probably large enough. Into it opens a small surgical room for men and next to that, opening directly into it, is a tiny room for women which must be used both as a waiting room and a room for surgical dressings. These three rooms must serve 6500 employees with an average

107 cases a day. During the last month, April, 1925, there were 659 new accident cases and also 33 compensation cases. In 25 days 1837 dressings were made and 95 eye cases were handled by the nurse. During this same time 143 cases went to the hospital and 30 eye cases were sent to the oculist.

If a sick girl comes to the "emergency hospital" she must go to the room in which surgical dressings are going on and where she must see those that are going on in the men's room also, for the door is always open, since the nurses must pass back and forth between the two rooms. There are two chairs in this room and one cot in a corner. There would not be space for any more furniture. The only toilet room opens directly into the men's surgical room. The nurses have to go to the floor above. The surgical room for men is very small and crowded. There are three trained nurses and a young girl assistant and there is also a Visiting Nurse. One of the three nurses is not employed in the dispensary, but is in charge of a little branch first-aid room where she takes care of minor injuries only. The Visiting Nurse, however, helps out with surgical dressings for the first hour of the morning.

Very little illness comes to the dispensary. During April 75 women out of the 800 employed came to ask for medicine, Only 68 men out of 5700 employed. The nurse deals with these cases as well as she can. The women come chiefly for menstrual difficulties for which the head nurse gives them a proprietary medicine. She says that she cannot talk to the girls and give them advice, because there is absolutely no privacy. As a usual thing people who are ill go home without seeing anyone in the dispensary.

The medical work of the porcelain factory is under the same management and the Visiting Nurse makes a daily trip for surgical

dressings. She works in an inside corner of the main room behind a screen where there is a small sink with cold water, an old table and a chair. It is recognized that this is a very poor provision for her work and she has been promised better quarters and a good equipment. The nurses connected with the Pittsfield Works seem to be giving admirable service under ^avery heavy handicap.

There is surprisingly little provision for the comfort of the 800 women employed in the Pittsfield Works. That the seating is poor is not to be wondered at, because the same thing is true of all the manufacturing plants, and the question will have to be carefully studied by the General Electric Company before it can expect any of the individual plants to introduce reforms on an intelligent basis, but the lack of rest rooms in the Pittsfield Works is striking as compared with the other manufacturing plants and does call for prompt improvement. Women are doing a good deal of work in some of the departments which requires standing all day and in some cases, as in winding transformer reels, they stand most of the time on one foot pressing the treadle with the other foot. Another fatiguing piece of work is the punch press for which the woman is obliged to sit poorly on her high chair pressing down to one side all the time. The foot rests are of all kinds, not apparently planned with much thought.

It is true that the majority of the women go home at noon, but in other plants, where the same thing is true, the cots and easy chairs are used by tired women who ought to be allowed to rest if they wish to. These are a few instances of the scanty provision which is found in Pittsfield. In Building 43, 200 office girls have one small room which contains 5 water closets, 6 basins, a cot, one easy chair, and 2 straight chairs. The factory girls, 100 to 250, are better treated for they have a good wash room with adequate facilities and a tiny

room adjacent which, although it has nothing but a cot and three straight chairs, is at least separate. There is another room for 129 office girls, about 10'x 10', but a raised place on the floor takes up part of this scanty space. This room has four toilets, four basins, a cot, two straight chairs and one old easy chair. About fifty girls from the blue print room belong in this group and they must come the whole length of the building and down a flight of stairs to reach a water closet. In Building 5 are the women who wind reels, standing all day and using the treadle. They have one cot and one easy chair in the room which contains the water closets and wash basins.

The usual objection to providing rest rooms for women employees is that it would encourage loafing, wasting time, but this objection would not have any force in Pittsfield for there is already a matron in charge of each one of these little wash rooms. These matrons seem well selected and they could certainly take charge of much larger premises.

My suggestions may be summed up as follows:

A stricter standard of cleanliness in the lightning arrestor department.

The substitution, if possible, of the shot blast for the sand blast.

More adequate medical care.

Better quarters for the dispensary.

Better and more numerous rest rooms for the women.

I should also advise the management to cooperate with the management of the other manufacturing plants in working out a proper program for seating women employees.

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