

Dr. W. S. Dove - Replaced Dr. Hurtado, Colombian Petroleum Company, Cucuta, Colombia.

November 18, 1941.

Dr. W. S. Dove,
Apartado Aereo 100,
Colombian Petroleum Company,
Cucuta,
Colombia.

AIR MAIL

Dear Dr. Dove:

My attention has been called by Mr. Risso-Gill of the Associated Ethyl Company, to the fact that you have replaced Dr. Hurtado, as medical director of Colombia Petroleum Company. Mr. Risso-Gill further informs me that he has forwarded certain articles on the medical aspects of the handling of tetraethyl lead and leaded gasoline, as translated into Spanish. There are quite a number of other articles on various phases of the problem of lead absorption and the diagnosis of lead poisoning, which have not been translated from the English, and which I can send you, if you are interested. The articles in your possession will probably convey to you much more adequately than a letter, the nature of the general medical problem. Perhaps, I might supplement them with a few comments. I shall also send you a memorandum which represents an attempt to express certain general medical policies which we have attempted to develop in connection with this work.

The men engaged in mixing Ethyl fluid with gasoline are exposed to certain rather serious potential dangers, since tetraethyl lead in its concentrated form is a very dangerous poison which can be absorbed into the body with considerable rapidity. However, if the work is done properly with the equipment provided for the purpose, there is no reason why anyone should absorb measurable quantities of lead. We have never had a case of lead poisoning among the several thousands of men engaged in this work in this country, and we are sure that if the equipment is kept in good condition, and if the regulations are followed, there will be no trouble. The medical supervision serves the primary purpose, therefore, of detecting any failure on the part of the men to follow the regulations and to do their work properly. Any evidence of lead absorption can be regarded as the result of some mistake or carelessness in handling the product. We believe that the examinations should be done carefully and at regular intervals, and that the men should be reminded of the necessity of great precision in following regulations. The mixing plant should be examined critically from time to time to see that it is kept in order, and the masks and all other protective equip-

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ment should be inspected to see that they are handled according to regulations.

Coming now to the subject of the gasoline, I wish to make point of the fact that there is no danger of lead poisoning in connection with the normal handling of the gasoline. Indeed, there is only one situation which requires mention in this connection. I refer here to the fact that under the conditions which prevail in a storage tank used for holding leaded gasoline, a number of things happen which give rise to acute danger of lead exposure when the tanks are entered for the purpose of cleaning. Without going into detail to explain what occurs, it may be said that the sludge in the bottom of such tanks may contain significant quantities of tetraethyl lead and other volatile lead compounds. Regulations have been issued for the avoidance of lead exposure in carrying on this kind of work, and management of refineries and storage plants should be kept acquainted with the dangers involved and with the necessity of following these regulations in the utmost detail. You will find specific reference to these regulations in the booklet of the regulations, which I am sending you. (We shall send the printed matter under separate cover by ordinary mail together with a copy of this letter.)

I should appreciate it very much if you would acquaint me with any difficulties or unusual circumstances which may develop in connection with this work. If I can be of any service to you in answering any questions or in giving you any other assistance, please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Cordially yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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