

Dr. G. J. Smyth
East London
South Africa

Copy to Mr. Pearson

February 17, 1941

Dr. G. J. Smyth
Adla House
58 Terminus Street
East London
South Africa

Dear Doctor Smyth:

I have received a communication from London, informing me of your appointment as medical consultant of the Associated Ethyl Company Ltd. in East London, an appointment which I herewith approve.

I shall attempt to send you separately a series of articles which are of importance in connection with your work, and I should appreciate it very much if you would communicate with me on receipt of this letter, and also on receipt of the booklets, so that I shall know whether or not either, or both of them, have reached you.

Even under the present disturbed conditions, I try to maintain contact with our medical representatives, and to keep acquainted with what is going on. Accordingly I should be very grateful to you if you would write to me, telling me as much of the character of the work as may seem useful, and raising any questions which may occur to you in connection with this work.

Briefly let me say that if the mixing plant has been properly built and is properly operated, and if the workmen conduct themselves in accordance with the regulations, no difficulties of any type should be experienced. Generally speaking, I regard the medical work as an additional safeguard and as an insurance against the development of carelessness, which I think would otherwise be inevitable. However there is one hazard connected with the handling of leaded gasoline which should be mentioned specifically. I refer here to the cleaning of tanks which have been used for the storage of leaded gasoline. On the last page of the book of regulations, you will find specific instructions in connection with this work. In some countries there might be a tendency to regard these instructions as unduly rigid. I can assure you that they are not,

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and that if they are not carried out in detail, there are likely to be serious cases of illness. We have had quite a number of cases of poisoning from this source in this country with a number of fatalities, and the illness which develops, as you will see in one of the articles which I am sending you, is of the type which none of us like to see. We have studied this problem with a great deal of care, and perhaps I should point out briefly what seems to occur. Under the conditions of storage of leaded gasoline in tanks, there is a slight decomposition of tetraethyl lead in the formation of organic lead compounds in the sludge at the bottom of the tank, which seem to be capable of reforming small quantities of tetraethyl lead. The quantities involved in the sludge are very small, and in our experience with a number of these tanks, they rarely make ^{up} more than one tenth of a per cent of the material lying in the water at the bottom of the tank. Usually the concentration is considerably under one-tenth of a per cent. On the other hand these materials are volatile, and when the sludge is handled without due precaution against inhalation and skin contact, men may develop acute tetraethyl lead poisoning. It is necessary, therefore, that every precaution against skin contact and especially inhalation, be taken. The regulations which we have devised for this purpose have demonstrated their adequacy, and if they are followed, the dangers of this work are not appreciable.

Please accept my thanks in advance for the courtesy of an occasional communication, for an acknowledgment of this letter and the receipt of the booklets which I am sending you.

Sincerely yours,

RAK:is

cc. Mr. Forest

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.