

May 10, 1938

Mr. Lester B. Roberts
Casilla de Correo No. 1704
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dear Mr. Roberts:-

I have your letter of April 21st concerning the difficulties arising from the examinations carried out by Dr. Hernandez in the San Antonio plant of West India Oil Company in Chile. Since the receipt of your letter, I have had a letter from Dr. Denno who is the General Medical Director of the Standard Oil Company and who, as such, is responsible for the medical direction of the affairs of West India Oil Company. Dr. Denno inquired about this situation in as much as the report made to him merely indicated that two of their workmen had been found showing signs of lead poisoning. Dr. Denno assumed that these two men were engaged in handling concentrated Fluid and asked if I had received any reports concerning them. He also assumed that the examinations had been made by our consultant. On the basis of your information, I was able to inform him about the situation and I have no doubt he will get in touch with Dr. Hernandez.

Meanwhile I think you have answered your own problem by supplying Dr. Hernandez with published information on the subject of leaded gasoline and its potential hazards. There is nothing further for us to do at the moment, I believe, and I shall not write to Dr. Hernandez unless I am specifically requested to do so by Dr. Denno.

You are quite right in your belief that microscopic changes in the blood do not provide an adequate basis in the diagnosis of lead absorption. Microscopic blood changes are not specific but may arise from a variety of other conditions of the blood. You are also right in suggesting that the danger of lead absorption is quite considerable among men who work in quarters in which unventilated containers of molten solder are used. Considerable quantities of vaporized lead, which is promptly oxidized, are given off from molten solder pots. It is standard practice to carry these vapors away by means of a well ventilated hood over these pots. Large-scale solder operations provide considerable opportunity for lead exposure and one finds in practice that carefully designed and operated ventilating equipment is necessary to prevent lead poisoning among men

engaged in such work.

I do not think it is wise for us to intrude into other plant activities of distributing companies except in so far as their lead hazards may give rise to confusion as to the sources of the lead exposure of men who are also engaged in handling leaded gasoline, or mixing Ethyl Fluid. It is for this reason that I have taken care to say in my instructions to our physicians, that they should be careful to exclude from our type of work men who are engaged in other types of lead exposure. Obviously where the opportunity presents itself to advance the cause of industrial hygiene, I should expect our medical consultants to take such action as may not get them into difficulties in relation to their specific responsibilities to us. Only to this extent do I think Dr. Coke might be justified in looking into this matter.

I have cabled you concerning the appointment of a physician in Sao Paulo, and having received your reply, I assume the matter is at a dead end for the moment. I think your investigations, as reported in your letters of April 21st and 26th, are quite in line with my own point of view as to proper procedure. I recognize fully that you may receive bad information and, therefore, you may be unsuccessful in your choice of a physician. However I think you proceed along the line which we discussed when we last talked over this matter, and I believe this means gives you the best opportunity for success.

Very truly yours,

RAK:is

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

cc Mr. Champlin