

May 15, 1928

Mr. E. W. Webb,
Ethyl Gasoline Corp.,
25 Broadway,
New York City.

Dear Mr. Webb:

The material of this letter and its enclosures relate to a matter quite familiar to you, and of which I have spoken to you previously. Since it concerns the general policy of the Corporation, I bring it directly to your attention.

For considerably over a year I have had some anxiety as to our mixing equipments at certain points in this country. Some of them are notably unsatisfactory. Others are considerably less than ideal. The worst ones are to be found at certain mixing points of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana. I have felt that the most valuable service that I could possibly render the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation would be the accomplishment of modification of these, to such an extent as to bring them up to a recognized excellency. The advisability of doing this is so apparent as scarcely to require discussion. However, it is worth while to point out that we should make all installations in such a way as to avoid hazards and to escape the intervention of state and other authorities. I am personally pledged to the Public Health Service to do this, and the Corporation, itself, is similarly responsible.

I have preferred to care for things of this sort by direct communication with the customers of the Ethyl Gasoline Corporation. With this purpose I have attempted conferences with responsible persons in the Indiana Company. These conferences have resulted in complete failure of action, and there has been a complete lack of consideration of my suggestions and inquiries. In fact I have been led to understand definitely that such matters were entirely in the hands of the Indiana Company, and that my intervention was unwelcome. In order that you may see that I am laboring under no misapprehensions in this matter, it is worth while to point out that the last installation of the Indiana Company at Zilwaukee was made without the advice, assistance or even knowledge of the technical representative of the Corporation. I should add that this last installation is in certain respects unsatisfactory.

It is impossible, therefore, for me to conduct further negotiations with representatives of the Indiana Company who are in charge of manufacturing. Mr. Beaumont Parks has been entirely unsympathetic to discussion, and has conducted himself in an unnecessarily unpleasant manner. I have no alternative but to drop my usual methods and resort to others. Therefore I am making a full report of the facts that are now in my hands, in the enclosed pages. These facts lead me to believe that we are dealing with hazards which are capable of producing lead poisoning; that these hazards are avoidable to a very large extent; that it is both unwise and dangerous to the future of this industry, to permit the continuance of these conditions. The growth of these hazards incident to the increase of business both at present, due to the nearness of summer,

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and in the future, due to natural expansion, makes them of such a type that I am unwilling to assume the responsibility for them. Furthermore it is only natural to assume that time will produce some degree of carelessness and contempt for such safety measures as are now in use.

I have determined, therefore, to bring the whole matter to a head at once, so far as my responsibility is concerned. If any cases of poisoning occur at these installations, under present conditions, I could not escape the blame for it, in spite of the fact that I have contributed my best efforts to changing the conditions. I have no intention of shouldering such blame. Therefore I must insist that unless I receive some indication of an intention on the part of the manufacturing department of the Standard Oil Company of Indiana, to correct them at once, I shall withdraw from any responsibility whatever, for the manner of operation of their plants, and the care of their employees. Furthermore since I cannot avoid my responsibility for these installations to the Public Health Service, I shall be compelled to report to Dr. Leake the discontinuance of my professional responsibility for such action as he may regard advisable. You will understand, I believe, that I cannot fail to do this, because of the personal confidence that the Public Health Service has had in the safety of these installations, as long as they come up to my requirements, and are under my observation.

I am very loathe to introduce these difficulties into the conduct of your business, at this or any other time. However, in the case of a company as large and as powerful as the Indiana Company I can see no valid excuse for the existence of conditions that are less than ideal. I am entirely unwilling to be responsible for the carrying on of lead hazards in addition to those already in existence in industry, and I will not sit camly by and see the development of methods and practices which are likely eventually to grow into a disregard of the dangers which lurk in the handling of such a compound of tetraethyl lead. If these things cannot be carried on in the light of the accumulating knowledge gained by both experiment and experience there is no point to my association with the industry.

The enclosed reports on the physical equipment at the various points in the Indiana field are submitted with very little comment. They might be criticized in detail. This can be done if it is desired. It will be seen at once that most of the installations do not come up to our minimal specifications. The one at Bay City is a disgrace, for its hazards may be appreciated by a novice. There is no possible justification for the continuance of such an equipment.

The question will immediately arise as to whether the hazards associated with these equipments are sufficient to produce tangible evidences of danger, or whether I am being merely arbitrarily critical. It might be pointed out that my judgment should be of some importance in that matter, but since that is of no special consequence to Mr. Parks of the Indiana Company, I am willing to waive it and point out certain significant facts, taken from the records in my office. These facts will be found in the report which I am submitting.

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In spite of the somewhat peremptory character of the above paragraphs, if the opportunity presents itself to discuss in detail the means of affecting satisfactory modification of these conditions with co-operative persons in the Indiana Company, I hold myself in readiness to render every service possible.

Very truly yours,

RAK:EJ
Encl.

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