

June 3, 1966

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Dear Bob:

A number of things have come to my ears lately from several sources which seem to point to an attitude of mind on the part of the American Petroleum Institute whereby, in the present somewhat critical situation, it is considered to be desirable to avoid the placement of responsibility for experimental work on the lead problem in the Kettering Laboratory, if it can be put anywhere else. I may not be stating the case fairly, and I may, of course, be unduly concerned. The fact is, however, that I have more professional responsibility in this matter than does any one else, and I am more than concerned lest a series of blunders be made by the industries involved, which will require years of hard and costly work to neutralize.

I have no doubt that the statements made by Harry Helman at the Symposium in Washington have given a slant to this matter which to those who are not "in the know" would consider to be important. The fact in this matter is that Harry is one of the prize asses in this field. Not only were his words totally uncalled for and entirely irrelevant, based as they were on ignorance of the subject (his forte is a glibness of speech which flows irresponsibly out of a profound ineptitude in matters of interpretation and cerebration), but he didn't even realize the import of what he said. Public relations people, without the critical judgment within the technical field concerned, might consider it wise to give ear to this matter, as one of tactical importance. On the other hand, there has never been a situation or a period when the position of the Kettering Laboratory, and the facts obtained by its investigative work have been so fully confirmed locally and internationally, as at this time. For those who have depended on us for information for the past thirty-five years to abandon their position of strength is not only frivolous, but clearly unwise.

My reason for speaking about this has, of course, as you will realize, a certain personal element, but actually I am not disturbed about my own place in the sun, nor am I in doubt as to the position of the Kettering Laboratory. When this present flurry has blown over, as it certainly will, I and the Laboratory will be more deeply entrenched than ever, partly because the facts are on our side, but even more so because they are available and their documentation, internationally, is sound.

No, these are not matters about which I need be concerned. What I am disturbed about is the willingness of the people in API to put certain matters that have taken years and years of effort and experience to appreciate into the hands of people who have not had the experience that would enable them to perform the tasks they are undertaking. I refer particularly to the animal experimentation in this field and even more to the analytical objectives, methods, and their precision. This Laboratory, through the single-minded and patient efforts of Fred

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Thamann (years ago), and the experience and persistent critique of Cholak, is the generally recognized arbiter in the analytical field in relation to lead, and a number of other elements. To allow others, at this juncture, to work on critical issues involving the use of new (in fact or in experience) and relatively unproved methods, is actually foolhardy, unless there is parallel work that can serve as the control, so to speak. I am not saying that these matters cannot be learned by honest and competent investigators, but they now involve trial and error. Error cannot be condoned or endured at this point in this matter. As an example of what I mean, I worked for fifteen years on certain types of animal experimentation in this field in a futile effort to learn certain basic facts, before I was compelled to turn to observations on human beings, both in the occupational environment and in the laboratory, for certain of these facts. We must now go through all of this again, so that the newcomers can relearn some of the facts of life. I have not even been asked to look critically at some of the proposals for costly investigations, some of which, as before, will certainly turn out to be valueless. There are things to be learned by these methods, certainly, but there are other aspects of this matter that simply cannot be learned through the investigation of laboratory animals.

Now, none of these matters would have the slightest significance, aside from the waste of time and money (the latter, in these days, being of little or no importance), but for the fact that the eyes of administrators and legislators will be focused on the results of these investigations. Any false step that yields false findings or ambiguous data that can be misinterpreted, may lead this group of industries to disaster in this matter. It is, therefore, a heavy responsibility, that is being taken much too lightly by people who do not understand the questions that are being raised in this matter, to decide what experiments should be undertaken and by whom.

I do not want to see this industry go down the drain because of false opinions, ambiguous findings, and loosely conceived ideas. I have a certain abiding pride in the achievements of the technical and production people of the industries here involved, in the areas of industrial and public health. Having had a share in these tasks and achievements, and having enjoyed the confidence and support of the technical and managerial people for so many years, and having been meticulously cautious not to lead them down the garden path, I do not abandon the field quietly and timidly. I cannot but be exceedingly concerned at the lighthearted manner in which valid technical considerations in the fields of physiology, toxicology and analytical chemistry are being ignored on account of some fictitious considerations of public relations. What is the matter with American industry, that it dare not stand up straight in the face of irresponsible criticism and unfavorable publicity and face its critics with confidence and dignity?

I write to you in this vein and on this subject because I have confidence in your judgment and intellectual poise, and because I believe you have much influence in the petroleum industry and in the American Petroleum Institute. I hope you will be able to see your way toward the development of a sound policy and position in these matters. Unless I am much mistaken by the straws in the wind, they are departing from the paths of good judgment. This is a very bad time for such departures. You may use the substance of my letter, discreetly, of course, in any way that may seem useful. However, this is essentially a confidential communication,

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and if you think my views are incorrect, irrelevant, or ill-timed, you can forget that they were expressed. You need not even reply.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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