

July 8, 1943

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Mr. Philip Drinker,
Chief Health Consultant,
United States Maritime Commission,
55 Shattuck Street,
Boston 15, Massachusetts.

Dear Phil:

I have been a little slow in writing to you about the potential hazards of the shipbuilding operations, which I had the pleasure of looking into with you the week before last. I finished the day with Dr. Schaefer and saw the launching of the ship, some time after having a talk with Mr. Willis. Concerning the latter, you may have heard that we did not do so well. Whether I got off on the wrong foot in the first part of our talk, or whether Mr. Willis' rather obvious bad humor created the difficulties, I am not quite sure, but in any case, Mr. Willis was quite unconvinced of the desirability of making their shipyard a "guinea pig" for the purpose of finding out what the Maritime Commission wanted to know. I trust that by this time Dr. Schaefer shall have ironed out the difficulties, and that it may be possible to go ahead with the observations.

I have no hesitation in telling you that in my opinion, the conditions with respect to lead exposure are quite hazardous. But for the relatively short period of exposure, and for the intermittency of the work, I am quite sure that cases of poisoning would have been seen by this time. In any case, I cannot imagine this work continuing in this manner without its bringing about the proper combination for the production of lead poisoning in a certain number of cases. As to the number and the severity of such cases, I would not like to hazard a guess, but that such cases will occur seems quite certain to me. I tried to explain this to Mr. Willis, but he took a point of view that we would create trouble where perhaps it might not occur otherwise. I do Mr. Willis the kindness of attributing his attitude to a state of irritation that had resulted either from the hot day or from difficulties in the Yard just before he came in to talk with us. Otherwise I should say that this is

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a type of ostrich policy which I have seen repeatedly in the past, and which represents one of the unaccountable stupidities of industrial management.

I realize the advisability of your having evidence with which to appraise the severity of present lead exposure and to prove the extent of a hazard. However, if I had any professional responsibility for hygienic conditions within these plants, I should have no hesitation in taking the position that the use of lead paints on these ships and on the materials entering into their fabrication, is highly hazardous. Certainly if other satisfactory materials are available in such a way as to make possible the avoidance of this hazard, while obtaining satisfactory results otherwise, there is no possible excuse for the use of red lead paints on these ships. Actually, the burden of proof should rest on the person or persons who are responsible for the tentative conclusions that this is not a highly hazardous source of lead exposure.

Finally, it would be my feeling that you should do everything you can to clear up this matter. If it can be done without the type of evidence I suggested obtaining, all well and good. If it cannot, then I suggest that you make every effort to obtain the evidence either at this shipyard or at some other.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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