

April 18, 1967

Mr. Hugh Cook, Director
Technical Division
Wine Institute
717 Market Street
San Francisco, California 94103

Dear Mr. Cook:

I think I should point out the fact, in brief response to your letter of April 14, that we have made no systematic investigation of the contribution made by the lead foil to wine via the work. We have reported only a few of many observations made from time to time on this and many other sources of the contamination of food and beverages with lead. It has not been necessary or even possible to look into the details in all of these matters, although in a number of situations we have followed raw food materials through the various steps of their production for the market. These arose out of the day's work of consultations and investigations involving industries that were under pressure in one way or another, or out of cases of lead poisoning that required investigation. Some of our information, therefore, is fairly comprehensive, while some is sketchy. Our purpose has been to learn in a fairly comprehensive manner the intake and output of lead of the ordinary people of this country, as background for the additional occupational exposure to lead.

In spite of the limitations of our evidence pointing specifically to the quantitative aspects of this source of the contamination of wine, there is, I believe, good reason to give serious consideration to the matter. As your technical people will be well aware, the organic acids, in wine, are excellent solvents for lead salts, while these products of the corrosion of the lead capsule are all too evident on its inside after the wine has been stored for some years. I doubt very much indeed that any alloy containing lead will prove to have resisted such corrosion effectively, given time.

I may say in addition, that as a lover of good wines, I am not worrying myself into a stew over this matter, nor do I expect to pursue it tenaciously. I do not consider it to be an highly important factor in its impact upon public health. I merely doubt that there is any good reason for permitting such a factor to operate. In this I may be mistaken. There may be some special virtue in the lead capsule. But again, I doubt that this is the case. However, I can assure you that some less significant matters have come under official surveillance, and if I were in the position of a responsible person in your industry, I would do whatever is necessary to explain myself in this matter or I would eliminate the issue.

Very truly yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.
Professor Emeritus of
Occupational Medicine

RAK:wp