

January 22, 1931

Mr. Wm. H. Holliday,
Pres. Standard Oil Co. of Ohio,
Cleveland, Ohio.

My dear Mr. Holliday:

I am writing to you in reference to the case of one of your employees, Mr. [REDACTED] of Akron, Ohio, who has been suffering for the past six months or such a matter with a paralysis of the right hand and forearm. I am taking the matter directly to you for the reason that I have been informed that you have already interested yourself in the case and know something of it. There is a further reason for writing you in that a matter of policy is involved which it seems to me will doubtless be brought to your eventual attention in any case.

I examined Mr. [REDACTED] early in October. At that time I was not able to arrive at a certain diagnosis. I suspected that it was not a simple peripheral neuritis, and thought seriously of the possibility of its being poliomyelitis though it was not an entirely typical case of the latter. I felt that it was necessary to follow the progress of the case, as the diagnosis would be determined somewhat by the extent and speed of recovery. This past week my associate, Dr. Machle, saw and examined Mr. [REDACTED] again. His conclusions, in which I concur, are that the thing is of the type of peripheral neuritis, probably not infectious in origin, presumably toxic. This conclusion arises largely from the fact that recovery is taking place at a fairly rapid rate. It is distinctly more rapid than would be expected in the case of poliomyelitis.

The cause of such a neuritis is difficult to determine. In my opinion the absorption of lead had nothing to do with the condition. This conclusion is based on the fact that his exposure was meagre, if present at all; that his blood findings do not indicate lead intoxication; and that his excretion of lead approximately a month after the onset of this neuritis was not of such a sort as would be expected in the case of lead absorption. On the other hand, this type of neuritis occurs as the result of a variety of intoxications, and it would be difficult to say with certainty that it was not lead. The subject had a fair amount of intestinal disturbances prior to his paralysis, and his occupation involved some exposure to gasoline. If presented therefore, as an industrial condition, it would be a difficult matter to rule out for medical legal purposes the possibility of gasoline intoxication or lead intoxication.

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It occurs to me that with these possibilities in mind and with a definite feeling on the part of Mrs. [REDACTED] that the condition is lead poisoning, that some action should be taken in this case by way of speedy compensation. If the family chose to bring suit or if, as may happen, they receive the advice of some attorney who feels that they have not had a square deal, to bring suit, it would be an exceedingly embarrassing matter to your company. On the other hand, in view of the reasonable doubt which exists in the case, it would be kind and it would also be politic to take such action as would give both Mr. [REDACTED] and his mother to feel that they were being dealt with fairly and in a straightforward manner. Under the present circumstances of Mr. [REDACTED] recovery such an action would not involve any acceptance of liability for serious injury for within a few months time there will be little evidence of injury remaining, and there will therefore be no question of permanent disability.

I do not mean to put the matter on too diplomatic basis. I should rather put it on a purely medical and humane one. This has been a very great misfortune for Mr. [REDACTED] through no obvious fault of his own, and there is some question in the matter as to whether the injury has a relation to his occupation. I personally always feel that the employee should be given the benefit of any doubt that exists. I merely point out furthermore that in my opinion it seems a wise thing to do, merely because I recognize that certain legal questions do and must arise.

I do not know what the situation of your employees is as regards compensation, nor do I presume to intrude into the affairs of your company in this matter. I write thus simply because I think it would be highly advantageous to have a case of this sort brought into the open as an influence to lay opinion at a time when we are about to find it possible to arrive at fair conclusions on questions involving the dangers of Ethyl Gasoline by straightforward experimental methods.

Very truly yours,

RAK:EJ

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