

April 23, 1940

Dr. N. E. Eckelberry
Consolidated Edison Company of New York Inc.
4 Irving Place
New York

Dear Doctor Eckelberry:

Although I did not find the time to telephone you while I was in New York, I dare say you have been informed that one of my associates and I made a series of observations in the garage at 491 Walton Avenue. We shall proceed with the analyses of the samples which we took as promptly as possible, and in due time I shall send you a report covering our observations as well as our conclusions. Meanwhile you may be interested in knowing that a rather detailed observation of the working conditions and the operations within the garage would seem to indicate beyond any very great doubt, that the hazards of lead exposure on the part of workmen in this garage are negligible. It is possible, of course, although I consider it unlikely from the information which I was able to obtain, that there were certain opportunities for lead exposure which do not appear at the present time. This question can always be raised regardless of the outcome of our analytical results, and because of this fact I wish to raise again the questions which I raised in my previous letter, and to discuss my reasons for raising them.

In my letter of April 3rd, I indicated that in my opinion it would be useful to determine the lead content of the blood and excreta of certain representative persons who are employed in the garage at the present time and who were in employment during the period in which the illness among the workmen developed. I can not agree with your statement that information of this type would not serve a useful purpose in connection with the cases in question. Observation of the garage and the workmen, and some discreet conversation with the men disclosed the fact that there are at least two men there whose work was of such a sort as to give rise to substantially identical exposure to lead as that of the two men who became ill. The night foreman, Mr. [REDACTED], has been employed in the garage for eleven years and during the entire period about which the question of lead exposure has been raised, he was continuing in his employment. Indeed he was so familiar with the whole situation that he is aware of the illness of these men and when he himself developed some visual difficulty which seems to have been corrected

by refraction, he wondered whether or not he was being effected by something in common with the other men. The point of this is that if there was a condition of lead exposure in the garage, Mr. [REDACTED] must have been exposed himself and if he absorbed significant quantities of lead at this time, it would be anticipated that he carries in his body some evidence of this exposure in terms of a higher lead content of his tissues. If this is the case, and particularly so if the exposure continues to exist, he should show a level of lead concentration in his blood and urine above that which is characteristic of normal people. If he does not show any such evidence of abnormal lead absorption, we can conclude with a reasonable assurance that no such exposure actually existed. From my observations I feel that it is reasonably fair to come to the conclusion that no exposure existed during that period which is materially greater than that present now. Indeed I feel certain that we have examined the conditions in this garage at the time of maximal exposure since, by reason of cold weather, the doors and windows were closed and since also, by reason of changes in heating equipment, the garage is kept more tightly closed now than it was in the period in question.

There is an additional man named [REDACTED] who could give us the answer to the question of any undue lead exposure in the stockroom. Wynne has been on this job for a longer time and more regularly than any other person. Therefore if there is any condition in this stockroom which predisposes to unusual lead absorption, he should show it in the form of an elevated lead absorption as revealed by the elevation of his blood and urinary lead concentrations.

I do not wish to urge upon you any procedure which there is sound reason to avoid. On the other hand it seems to me there is an important question which involves not only your men but quite a large number of other men and from my point of view, if it is at all possible, I should not like to pass up any opportunities to establish the facts on a sound basis. I realize the value of air analyses in the recognition of lead exposure. On the other hand, as I have indicated elsewhere, there are certain shortcomings in this method of approach which are more than made up for by a study of the workmen. Workmen move about and in the course of their work automatically expose themselves to all of the conditions which exist. They represent the most ideal mechanism for detecting and recording the effects of lead exposure. Their recording mechanism has been active during the entire period of time in which one is interested and it is, therefore, of the utmost usefulness to take advantage of the information thus provided.

I should recommend that these two men be called in to your office for examination and that samples of their blood and urine be obtained under your supervision in

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case of the other men. Whether we obtain positive or negative evidence, through the analyses of the samples from these men, we shall have the best information which can be obtained at this time concerning the significance of any lead exposure which existed in this garage during the time in which the two men had their alleged lead exposure. It would be interesting, of course, to collect large samples of urine and also samples of feces on these men, but this will not be necessary for my purpose and therefore it would be possible to obtain the material which we need in a very short period of time and in the course of an ordinary examination. Naturally I must leave it to you as to whether this can be done, but I think I should be guilty of some neglect if I did not thus urge upon you the advisability of this procedure from a purely technical point of view.

Cordially yours,

RAK:ls

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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