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214 East 18th Street
New York 3, N. Y.

May 20, 1955

Mr. Manfred Bowditch
Lead Industries Association
420 Lexington Avenue
New York 17, N. Y.

Dear Manfred:

I have your letter of May 16th, enclosing a copy of the proposal of the Australian Federation of Organizations of the Blind to request the Federal government to prevent the manufacture of paint with more than 5% soluble lead.

This approach to the prevention of blindness strikes me as entirely unrealistic. While it is true that under certain conditions lead intoxication may produce optic atrophy and blindness, it would seem to me that the rational approach to the problem is to prevent lead intoxication by control of the lead exposure wherever it occurs. For, it is well known that this is entirely possible with proper application of control methods well known to all specialists in industrial hygiene.

There are literally thousands of chemical substances - other than lead - to which workers are exposed in industry today. Some of them are far more toxic than lead. And with our advancing technology, new ones are being added daily. Among them are many substances which are capable of causing serious eye damage unless adequately controlled. The point is that they can be used with safety.

Unless a country wishes to revert to an agricultural economy - or even a nomadic economy - and sacrifice all of the advances in the standard of living of its population, including adequate nutrition, housing and the like - it seems to me that there is no alternative but to develop industrially, utilizing all available technological techniques and materials; knowing, all the while, that industrial hygiene know-how is keeping pace with technological advances, and is actively engaged in protecting the health of the workers. While our knowledge along these lines is not as yet entirely adequate in every respect, it is constantly growing. At any rate, we have reached the stage where we know how to protect the health of lead workers - regardless of the lead content of the materials with which they come into contact - and we know how to prevent them from developing optic atrophy and blindness from exposure to lead.

I would suggest that the Federation - with whose objectives we are all in complete accord - communicate with the industrial hygiene group in Sydney, and ask their cooperation in working out their problems. I have an idea that, were they to do this, they would be pleasantly surprised to learn that this matter is well in hand, and that their fears are groundless. In any event, using their own industrial hygiene personnel as consultants, I am sure that they will be gratified with the expert assistance which this professional group can supply.

Sincerely yours

/s/ May