

May 21, 1970

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Dear Doctor Wolf:

Mr. Cholak brought your letter of May 11th to my attention and I suggested that he let me reply, since the matter of hygienic standards is a medical problem, largely. There are other considerations of policy which, in this matter, have been within my province. (As you may or may not know, I have continued, in Emeritus capacity, my work in the Kettering Laboratory, and my contacts, to a considerable extent, with various people and groups concerned with these problems.)

We have employed tests of the extractibility of lead from glazes for many years, and in this instance we aided in the development of a more or less standardized test for the use of American ceramic manufacturers. It is primarily a procedure for the use of a 5% acetic acid (a hot or cold solution might be required dependent upon one's judgment as to the appropriate severity of the test), to be applied in appropriate quantity within a glazed receptacle (cup, etc.) for a specific period of time, after which the lead content of the solution is determined. There is no "official" standard, but the industrial group concerned, has adopted a standard. (I'm not sufficiently familiar with the details to make a precise statement, but it has to do with a certain range of extractibility - a few parts per million in the solution.) This group of producers of household table and kitchen ware have arranged with the Pittsburgh Testing Laboratory to check their product and to apply a seal of quality to articles which pass the test. (I state this in this manner because I've been out of touch with this situation for some time, and I wish merely to state the principle without making any misstatements as to present procedure.) In my view, the quantitative aspects of the standard are crucial, and I am by no means certain that they have been dealt with properly. I have had no part in them for a number of years, and it is likely that the entire matter should be reviewed.

As to the test originally designed, I shall ask Mr. Cholak to forward a note to you. He is out of the Laboratory for a few days on a survey job. It seems that there is some dissatisfaction with the use of a single test. I'm not sure of the nature or sources of the dissatisfaction, but it has been thought that there may be significant differences which favor certain other solvents, as for example, coffee. We have some data of this type and I cannot say that I have been greatly impressed by their importance, but there may be room for further investigation, and I believe, from a comment made to me at the recent annual meeting of AIHA, that something is in the air in this direction.

(Incidentally, I was to have prepared a report of our meetings and deliberations on this matter years ago for submission to the group and to your Department, among others. I did not succeed in doing this for reasons which now seem rather lame.

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The whole affair came about at a time when I was deeply involved in a number of other matters, and since it was necessary to postpone the preparation of a full report, and since the pressure on me did not let up until the time of my retirement, it just didn't get done. It would not do to try to do this now, without direct contact with the people concerned, so that I fear the proper time has passed. I continue to be concerned with the issues, however.)

As I am sure you are aware, although many others are not, this is not only a matter of the importation of foreign products into the United States, but one involving domestic production as well. We have encountered a number of situations in which individual entrepreneurs mostly with artistic and amateur impulses have produced dangerous objects for household use. We have seen several cases of poisonings on this account, and similar cases have been reported (correctly or incorrectly as the case may be) by others. There is no means, so far as I know, for establishing effective control of the amateurs, and the small concerns, which operate in complete independence of the organized sources of knowledge. Moreover, the problem of imports (perhaps, according to gossip, from Mexico in particular) is a difficult one to handle.

I do not think the problem of a standard of quality, or that of a method of testing in relation to such a standard, would pose any great difficulty, but the mechanisms of effective enforcement are bound to be difficult, if not always, to some extent, ineffectual. If there is anything which I can do to be of assistance in this matter, especially in providing information, I should be pleased to do so. Meanwhile, I think it wise to write to Jerry Cole, now of Lead Industries Association, and to find out from him what he knows about the situation. This is certainly a country-wide issue, and it should, if possible, be dealt with nationally.

Sincerely yours,

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

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cc: Mr. Cholak

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