

April 15, 1949

Mr. Manfred Bowditch,  
Director of Health and Safety,  
Lead Industries Association,  
420 Lexington Avenue,  
New York City 17.

Dear Manfred:

Your letters of March 29 to myself and G. H. Gehrman have had their answer from Gehrman and a partial answer from me in Detroit. For the record, however, I might make one or two remarks. Incidentally, I wonder if this was not a man named [REDACTED], on whom we have a fairly considerable record. If that should be the case, I should be interested in being so informed. It is entirely possible for a man to be significantly exposed to fumes of lead during welding operations on the exhaust lines of airplanes or automobiles or on the exhaust systems used in garages and certain establishments for carrying the exhaust gases directly to the outside. The accumulation of lead compounds in the exhaust system may well be appreciable, and it is a practice in some places to have a relatively small line to which the motor exhaust is directly attached and by means of which the exhaust gases are let to the outside. Some considerable deposit of lead compounds might result under these conditions. It would not be supposed that welding or other repair operations of short duration would result in difficulty, but any sort of prolonged (weeks) exposure as a consequence of such welding procedures might give rise to lead poisoning. We have seen one such case in connection with more or less systematic repair and maintenance operations on engine parts and exhaust systems. This problem has been subjected to a considerable amount of investigation, and whenever any such incident has been brought to the attention of the safety organization of Ethyl Corporation it is investigated carefully and reported to me, whereupon we take any action that may be indicated for the protection of personnel.

I told you that I would talk to Frank Princi about the experimental project which we discussed briefly last week. As I anticipated, I found his ideas on the subject very well developed, and his proposal certainly made sense to me. I did not comment directly on your suggestion that rats or other small animals, (I believe you mentioned mice) might be substituted for dogs in work of this sort. I quite agree with him that this would not be desirable and that it is necessary to follow what goes on in the animals by analytical means. Since analyses of the blood are the simplest way of doing this, it becomes necessary to use an animal of sufficient size to provide such samples. Frankly, I should not consider the job worth doing on small animals.

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I have an opinion on the likelihood of any beneficial effect of the use of strontium. Such an experiment would be interesting, but I think the outcome is predictably negative. Nevertheless, this is an interesting subject, and it may well merit investigation. As to the other substances, the work of the Italian investigator strongly suggests that there may be something in it, and I feel that it is worthy of careful investigation. No man who is worth his salt will let anybody else tell him how to conduct an investigation, and I am quite willing to say that I should be very happy to trust the outcome of this experimental venture to Frank Princi. Moreover, I might make one additional remark, which is not intended to be nasty. I should consider it most unlikely that any very useful contribution could be made to this subject, in its present state on an expenditure of a few hundred dollars. I am not developing lofty ideas, but this kind of work is rather costly, and I do not believe in approaching it by slipshod methods. We have enough half-baked answers, by which the situation is greatly confused. What we actually need are answers which are obtained with sufficient care and precision so that they will not have to be repeated, but will stand.

Sincerely yours,

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Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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