

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE

55 Shattuck Street
Boston 15, Massachusetts

January 2, 1947

Dr. Robert A. Kehoe
Kettering Laboratory of Applied Physiology
University of Cincinnati
College of Medicine
Eden Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Bob:

Answering your letter about possible lead poisoning from cutting up ships, I am sending your letter to Mr. Edward J. Tracy, Director of Shipyard Labor Relations, U. S. Maritime Commission, Washington, D. C. and he probably will write you direct. I am too much out of all this now to be of much help. I remember the experiments we did here at my lab in cutting up steel plates with standard type of lead painting on them. Results showed that extremely high lead concentrations were possible in the air breathed by men manipulating oxy-acetylene torches. There is no doubt at all that procedures which would be used today would be a lot more likely to cause lead poisoning than those used after the last war in dismantling battleships.

Like you, I remember vividly the unfortunate series of lead poisoning cases found in various Navy yards. Modern practice in welding and cutting is a lot faster than that used twenty-five years ago. I believe that the shipyard doing most of this work in the East is probably Bethlehem Steel Company, Sparrows Point, Maryland. This may be the same shipyard that you visited with me during the war. It is run by the same executives and the medical staff is under Dr. Floyd Shaffer. You will remember, I know, our failure to get any real help from Mr. Jack Willis, then and now in charge of the Bethlehem yard.

Sincerely yours,


Philip Drinker

PD/F

cc: Mr. E. J. Tracy

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