

February 25, 1975

Mr. Lawrence E. Blanchard, Jr.
Executive Vice President
Ethyl Corporation
330 South Fourth Street
Richmond, Virginia 23217

Dear Larry:

Thanks very much, indeed, for your nice letter of February 14, to which I hasten to reply. I am pleased that you have reacted to my letter of February 11th.

The carelessness to which I referred cannot certainly be laid at the doorway of Ethyl Corporation personnel, but I have been so impressed with certain facts which have come to light that I have anticipated further difficulties. I have gone a bit beyond my knowledge of the attitudes of some of our people abroad, in speaking of "carelessness."

The facts to which I refer are the difficulties which have occurred on ships where our people find great difficulties in controlling the activities of ship's officers and crews. Ethyl Fluid gets into places on board ships where it should never have a chance to go. The activities there have to be absolutely perfect, and they have not been so.

I am fully aware of the difficulties telling ship's officers and crews what to do. On the other hand, the lives of crew-men are dependent on the perfect performance of their work, and they must somehow be made to be aware of their responsibility. There is simply no excuse for the poisoning of the people who do the work on shipboard, and further occurrences of this type must by some means be prevented. Furthermore, when these things occur on shipboard, it is fully apparent that the avoidance of errors of performance is not being achieved. The correct performance must be achieved for the consequences of carelessness are much too severe to be endured. We have succeeded in doing other things that are much more difficult to accomplish, and there is no question at all that the failure to do this is the fault of the people concerned with supervision and control who have not taken their job sufficiently seriously.

I know full well that I am being hard and relentless about this type of performance but I simply cannot endure silently this type of irresponsibility.

We - all of us - know that many persons are willing to endure this type of lack of care. But it will not do where the health and lives of workmen are involved.

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Workmen cannot be blamed for "getting by" with certain degrees of carelessness if they can do so. They must never be able to "get by" for it cannot be done for long, and the consequences justify the worst type of tyranny for their prevention.

I hope you find this type of thinking being accepted as inevitable in the foreign field as it is in certain activities in the domestic area. Unfortunately, this is not at all the orthodox philosophy of preventive medicine, but it must become so in the industrial field in the more dangerous trades and activities, for the reason that the courts in damage suits never (or hardly ever) act on the basis of the rational feeling that people - all people - are imperfect and must be forgiven in the exaction of penalties, which make no allowance for their imperfections.

With regards and best wishes,

Sincerely,

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

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