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HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Managing Editors

PHILIP DRINKER
MARGARET S. PERRY

Editorial Office

55 SHATTUCK STREET
BOSTON 15, MASS.

September 16, 1948

Dr. Robert A. Kehoe
Kettering Laboratory
College of Medicine
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati 19, Ohio

Dear Dr. Kehoe:

We have received the enclosed manuscript from Hamlin and Weber of the American Brake Shoe Company on "Further Observations on Control of a Lead Hazard in the Brass Foundry Industry". This is a second report from them, the first one having been published in this journal in Volume 29, p. 367, 1947.

As Professor Drinker will be away until the middle of November probably, our reviewers here would very much like to have your opinion of this paper and whether you think it is suitable for publication in our journal.

I am sorry to trouble you with this.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret S. Perry

Margaret S. Perry, editor

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This paper in its present form is unworthy of the Journal. Disregarding, at the moment, any merits or deficiencies of the factual information and the conclusions derived therefrom, the paper is poorly written and poorly arranged, and there is general evidence of carelessness, even the calculations of percentages being incorrect. No doubt the editors will not wish to be so direct and so personally critical in communicating with the authors, as is this reviewer, but the Journal should not publish anything so poorly organized and written as is this paper.

The data are poorly presented from a number of aspects. The lumping of data and other conditional factors involving individuals and groups into average values obscures many of the relevant and necessary facts. I strongly suspect that the conclusions would be quite different if the data were arranged for study in other ways. Obviously the authors have not employed even simple accepted methods for the examination of their data. It does not even appear that the earlier analytical data, said by the authors as less reliable, have been separated out. It appears that certain working impressions have been arrived at, and that these have been set down without such critical study of the data as would prove or disprove their validity. The impressions are of interest, but they could just as well be stated without data, since the data as presented prove little or nothing.

As to the argument and conclusions, one could take the data, poorly presented as they are, and on the basis of a different viewpoint, could arrive at conclusions diametrically opposed to those expressed. An incidence of plumbism so high as that defended here is enough to ruin certain industries, unless indeed the severity of cases and the duration of disabilities were slight. Yet not a word is said about these important matters. The attempted "explanations" of the cases are fumbling, and indeed are careless and irresponsible, unless they are an expression of naivete and inexperience. I do not say that the Journal need accept the responsibility for the opinions here expressed. On the other hand if the authors have something better with which to back their opinions than that given here, they should be induced to bring it out. The opinions given are not justified in terms of the current situation of the lead trades, medically, hygienically, socially or economically, nor are they supported by the facts presented in the paper itself. They can be torn to shreds by anyone who cares to do so.

Over and above the thesis of this one paper, there is a great flurry at present to disregard the standards derived tentatively from previous experience in the lead trades, and to liberalize them considerably. Those who seem

most active in this are rediscovering what some of us have outgrown years ago. This flurry will have run its course in five or ten years or less when present information shall have gained more current application. The Journal should not, without great caution, lend itself as the sounding board for this activity. It should demand contributions to our information, not inadequately supported expressions of opinion. By such policy it will continue to have reason for pride in what it has done to advance concepts and practice in the field of industrial hygiene.

- To return to this paper - It is possible or even likely that the facts represented in this paper could be assembled advantageously in such a manner as to be useful. First, a simple statement would be required as to their origin in a program which is not as yet fully developed and perfected. Then should come the presentation of the data in more appropriate form (by years, for example, and/or with illustrations of variability in relation to time and method of sampling and analysis). Then a modest and tentative interpretation of further procedure and applications of procedure could properly be made. "Impressions" referred to previously, could be stated, but the thesis that present standards are too exacting for "practical" purposes, on the basis of the apparent accomplishments up to date, is presumptuous and impertinent and, excepting as it is made naively, and in ignorance of what others have done and published, it is professionally reprehensible. Such a statement should not be countenanced in the pages of the Journal on such flimsy evidence as has been provided. Also the philosophy concerning the health of the "greatest number of men" cannot be acceptable, without very careful qualifications, to the Journal. Actually I think this philosophy is badly expressed rather than badly conceived, but certainly it cannot be accepted as it is said, for the sake of either "practicality" or common decency.