

May 22, 1943

AIR MAIL

Mr. Ray Bevan,
The Associated Ethyl Company Limited,
Artillery House,
Artillery Row,
London, S. W. 1,
England.

Dear Ray:

There are two matter to which I think I should call your attention, inasmuch as they are somewhat new developments of your problems.

1. First, with respect to the transportation of Ethyl Fluid on ships at the present time, we have had to revise the methods of transportation on ship board for a number of reasons which will be quite clear to you. Every effort is still being made to see that the drums are shipped on deck when it is possible. Nevertheless cargoes are shipped between decks and actually within the hold. Inspection at this end of the line has been carried out for the most part, but under present conditions it is entirely possible that some shipments have gone out about which we know little or nothing. I cannot go into this in any detail for obvious reasons. However, it seems to me likely that there may be difficulties both in transit and at ports of destination. If leaks occur at points on the ship which can not well be cleaned, there may be serious difficulties both at the time of unloading and subsequently. Accordingly I think I should call this to your attention. Your knowledge of what happens at the destination of these ships may be as uncertain as ours. However, in some instances it may be very much better than ours, and I think you should take any steps which may be feasible to inform responsible people concerning the potential difficulties as well as what might be done to clean up spills. Anything you find it possible to tell me about this situation as you know of it will be advantageous. If I had any actual knowledge of difficulties outside of this country, I might be able to take certain steps to see that more effective handling of the problem is achieved. Moreover, if any facts and information come to you on which I can help you in any way, I hope you will not hesitate to ask me. We certainly should do everything we can, not only to avoid trouble at this time, but to prevent practices that will bring us to grief later.

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2. Another matter has arisen about which I think you should have information in relation to your manufacturing plant. You will remember that you received information about a method of treating leather gloves which would render them impervious to penetration by tetraethyl lead and Ethyl Fluid. For a number of reasons we have had occasion to re-examine this question, and the facts briefly are these. The method of dipping leather gloves in a mixture of soap and glycerine coats the leather with a film which may be fairly effective if it is entirely undisturbed. However, this mixture does not penetrate the leather to any appreciable degree, and when the leather is bent or traumatized, the film is broken and the fluid penetrates rapidly. On this account, the gloves may be a source of false security, and I think you should be advised that this protection ought not to be taken too seriously. In fact, in my opinion it might even be better if the leather gloves were not coated at all. If they were simply used as mechanical protection, and if they were discarded promptly if and when they came to be contaminated, we should all be running less risk than we are at present. We shall study this problem with considerable care. I am having a conference with a number of our people to see what can be done to determine what practical steps to take in the plants at the present time. You will remember that I have always advised the use of rubber gloves at mixing plants. I see no reason to change this recommendation. Rubber as well as neoprene of very good quality prevents the penetration of tetraethyl lead and Ethyl Fluid for a considerable period. Despite the fragility of these materials, they resist much better than leather gloves. I doubt the wisdom of using such gloves in the manufacturing process for a number of reasons. Nevertheless, we shall thrash this out and in due time I will send you further recommendations together with the reports of our observations. It may seem strange that this information comes to you at this late date, and indeed it is strange. However, it would be my suggestion that you pass this information along to the manufacturing plant and that the management be advised to see to it that no undue faith is put in these leather gloves for more than the briefest protection. Obviously contaminated leather gloves will have to be discarded and destroyed at the earliest possible time.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

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