

February 17, 1939

Mr. F. J. Mechlin  
Director of Laboratories  
P. O. Box 3374  
Baton Rouge, La.

Dear Mr. Mechlin:-

I have your letter of January 30th concerning the determination of traces of lead in body fluids of workmen. In as much as this is a research laboratory pure and simple, it will not be possible for us to do work of this kind on a commercial basis. As a matter of fact, our work for the DuPont Corporation fits in with a program of general experimental work which we have been carrying on for years. This work, therefore, is not of the commercial variety. It is our purpose to collect information systematically in lead trades in connection with workmen who are kept under clinical supervision, and on whom we can obtain satisfactory and adequate clinical data in addition to the analytical results. We might be able to work out some regime whereby we could do this work in connection with cases in which you are interested, provided the necessary information could be supplied to us in sufficient detail. In that case we would do the work as we do for DuPont on the basis of the actual cost of the analytical work. In such an event, we would wish to obtain samples collected in accordance with our instructions in containers which we supply for the purpose. We would also wish to have full clinical data on the cases in question, since, obviously, there is no value whatever in random lead determinations.

Permit me to say, in connection with your query, that you are not correct in believing that qualitative tests in excreta or other body fluids would be of any value whatever. All persons, regardless of their occupations, contain small quantities of lead in their blood, their tissues, and in their excreta. To have any diagnostic value, therefore, the results must be obtained in precise quantitative terms. Moreover the utmost precautions are required in the collection of the material for analysis. Otherwise they are certain to be contaminated with lead in the process of collection.

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The same general statement applies to the examination of blood for the detection of carbon monoxide. We do not do commercial diagnostic work of any kind, but are merely concerned with the experimental study of occupational intoxications. Anything which we do from a purely diagnostic point of view is either associated with our own experimental work, or is done as a convenience for practicing physicians. Obviously we must keep such work at a minimum or we will interfere with our main business, which is that of experimental work.

Sincerely yours,

RAK:is

Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.