

November 28, 1938

Dr. Russell Wilder
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota

Dear Doctor Wilder:-

A few days ago my attention was called to a case of alleged lead poisoning derived reputedly from the handling of leaded gasoline. Cases of alleged injury or illness from this cause are usually reported to me promptly through arrangement with the industry, and they can be investigated in an early stage. Unfortunately, this one has come to my notice only through the filing of a suit by one [REDACTED] of Glen Jean, Fayette Co. West Virginia, against his employer and also the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.

I have been asked by the defendants to examine into the facts and to advise them, and inasmuch as I have never been able to find evidence of lead poisoning or of lead absorption in association with the handling of leaded gasoline, I am not impressed by the occupational history in that regard. It appears, however, that [REDACTED] was at the Mayo Clinic in August of 1937, returning home September 4, 1937, and it has been reported that a diagnosis of lead poisoning was arrived at, and that he was advised not to continue working at a gasoline filling station. It seems improbable to me that a diagnosis of lead poisoning was ever made in such a case, and the most likely supposition is that this man suffered from a contact dermatitis which may have been attributed to gasoline, or perhaps, to leaded gasoline.

I do not wish to obtain any information which you cannot properly give me, but I should be most grateful if you would let me know whether this man's illness was diagnosed as lead poisoning at the Clinic, or whether my assumption is substantially correct. Perhaps, if the man was treated on the dermatological service, you would be good enough to refer my letter to the head of that service.

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For obvious professional reasons, I am much more concerned with the facts as to the diagnosis and the basis for the diagnosis in this case than I am with the legal aspects of the matter, so that if you or your colleagues wish me to hold in confidence such information as you may choose to give me, I should feel bound by your wishes. However, I should like the privilege of reporting the facts to Dr. Sayers of the U. S. Public Health Service, with whom I have had a gentleman's agreement over a period of years, covering the reporting of such cases. You know, doubtless, that we in this laboratory have studied the problem of lead exposure and lead absorption in relation to leaded gasoline in almost every conceivable way over a period of almost fifteen years, and if we have erred in our observations and conclusions, it is time we were discovering our errors.

Cordially yours,

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Robert A. Kehoe, M.D.

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