

December 22, 1948

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Walter J. Murphy, Editor,  
Chemical and Engineering News,  
1155 16th Street, N. W.,  
Washington, D. C. (6)

*Kehoe doesn't mention he is being paid to do research for U. S. Steele to use in court, the same company the victims were suing over their air pollution*

Dear Mr. Murphy:

My attention has been called to an article on page 3692 of the December 13 issue of Chemical and Engineering News, relating to the Donora tragedy. The article gives what purports to be an official report which, from its character and from the statements in the article, has been inspired by one Philip Sadtler.

It is most unfortunate that this article was written at this time and in this fashion, and I cannot fail to criticize seriously the issuance of such a statement which is quite without support, being based on alleged facts which could not possibly have been obtained, and which are almost certainly untrue. Those of us who have been working in this field for many years know how difficult it is to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion in a situation of this sort. Various groups of scientific workers are either investigating this matter or are planning to do so in considerable detail, knowing that the answer to the problem will be difficult. That the issue should be confused, at this time, by wholly unwarranted statements, is a great disadvantage to everybody, and not least to the families and friends of the unfortunate victims. The matter quite clearly deserves the careful consideration which it will receive. You may be aware of the fact that the United States Public Health Service is planning an extensive investigation. If the answer is as easy as your statement implies, this would be wholly unnecessary.

One of the principle items of evidence cited in the article is that many times the normal concentration of fluorine has been found in the blood of victims. The analysis of the blood for fluorine is a very difficult procedure, and even under conditions of severe exposure the concentration of fluorine in the blood is quite low. My associates and I believe that no such results as have been reported here are possible of achievement, and therefore we regard the entire story as a deliberate lie or as an irresponsible expression of technical ignorance or incompetence. It is my feeling that such a publication as yours should weigh more carefully the sources of its information before issuing a statement of this kind on a matter which is of such obvious importance in relation to the public health. I cannot but feel that your performance in this instance is an expression of irresponsible news reporting. This is all the more reprehensible as the action of an extremely distinguished scientific organization such as the American Chemical Society.

Mr. Walter J. Murphy, Editor - (2) - December 22, 1948

Since I and my associates are engaged in investigations at Donora, I do not wish to be quoted in any way in this connection, lest I be suspected of having drawn conclusions before facts are available. Otherwise I should be quite prepared to accept the full responsibility for any statement made in this letter. I trust, therefore, that you will use this letter only for the purpose for which it is intended, namely, that of calling your attention to the importance of this situation.

Very truly yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

RAK ef

C.C.: Dr. Dudley Irwin

Irwin was the Director of  
Medical Research for Alcoa

# Chemical and Engineering

# NEWS

PUBLISHED BY THE  
AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY

1155 SIXTEENTH STREET, N. W.  
WASHINGTON 6. D. C.

WALTER J. MURPHY  
EDITOR

January 7, 1949

Dr. Robert A. Kehoe  
Kettering Laboratory of Applied  
Physiology  
College of Medicine--Eden Avenue  
University of Cincinnati  
Cincinnati 19, Ohio

Dear Dr. Kehoe:

Your letter of December 22d has been referred to me by Dr. Walter J. Murphy, as I have been following this matter of the news item on the Donora tragedy which appeared in our December 13th issue.

For your information I am enclosing a photostatic copy of the material we received from Philip Sadtler and on which the news item was based. (Please return this copy as soon as possible.) You will note that the title is "Official Donora Report." This report went to one of our assistant editors and unfortunately was not checked and verified before use. Of course, I must say that the person who handled it here had no reason to be suspicious and accepted it on good faith.

*copies made  
I available  
in B. C. C. file*

After publication of the story, we received several criticisms in addition to yours. As a result, I checked with Dr. Joseph Shilen, of the Department of Health of the State of Pennsylvania, the U. S. Public Health Service, and the Borough of Donora Council. Their replies make it clear that the designation of Sadtler's report as official was definitely misleading. A statement indicating this will be published shortly in C & EN.

I have heard from Sadtler recently, and he insists that he has made tests on the blood of victims of the disaster and on vegetation, etc., in the area and that he has chemical evidence of unsafe concentrations of fluorine. He claims that he volunteered to check his analytical methods and results with representatives of the public health agencies but that they were uncooperative.

I note from your letter that the analysis of fluorine in blood is quite difficult and that you feel Sadtler could not have obtained the results indicated. It seems to me that this is one point, at least, where scientific methods could be checked and agreement reached on

Dr. Robert A. Kehoe

-2-

January 7, 1949

whether the various results are or are not accurate. It is not our intention to become embroiled in this matter and permit our pages to become a battleground for this case, but for our own information we would be interested to know the results of any analytical findings of your investigation.

We regret that the Sadtler report was written up as it was in our publication. We will try to correct the misleading impression that it was the official report. I have asked Dr. Schrenk, of the U. S. Public Health Service, to keep me informed on the investigation and when the real official report is issued, we hope to publish the essential findings.

Very truly yours,



James M. Crowe  
Executive Editor

JMC:OJ  
Enclosure

January 12, 1949

Mr. James M. Crowe,  
Executive Editor,  
Chemical and Engineering News,  
1155 Sixteenth Street, N.W.,  
Washington 6, D. C.

Dear Mr. Crowe:

Thanks very much for your letter of January 7, and especially for your enclosure of the report of Mr. Stadtler on which your news article was based. I can see that your staff was up against something of a problem, in that they were quite obviously the victims of deliberate fraud. I can see no other means of explaining the performance of Mr. Stadtler in this situation, and this act is quite in keeping with the reputation that he has achieved in a number of other situations with which I am more or less familiar. Perhaps from that point of view my criticisms were a little severe. Certainly very few alleged investigators would have had the effrontery to provide you with the kind of report made in this instance and to indicate that it was an official report.

You may be interested to know that there are records available on only one necropsy among the victims of the Donora tragedy, and therefore the statement that tests were made on the blood of victims would seem to be quite untrue. As to such tests, my associates in this Laboratory have made a goodly number of analyses on the blood of experimental animals under known conditions of exposure, and we can testify to the fact that evidence of exposure to fluorine can hardly ever be obtained by this means. The statements of Mr. Stadtler in this instance are precisely like those he has made in a number of other situations, and they are so palpably untrue that it is not even worth while to check up on them. Because of the unsavory reputation of this individual, and because of the complete responsibility of his statements, we would not like to deal with him in any way at all. It is quite apparent from your quotation of his remarks that representatives of the Public Health Service have the same attitude. We, like they, would be classed as "uncooperative."

In connection with Stadtler's report I might make a few comments. There are a number of possibilities, besides those mentioned in his report, for the occurrence of toxic materials in the atmosphere of this area. These will require investigation and none of them can be dismissed in favor of hydrofluoric acid as lightly as has been done in this report.

The alleged "case for fluorine" looks quite convincing on the basis of ten statements of fact. However, for the large number of these statements of fact there is no evidence whatever, and the amount of investigation that would be required to prove or disprove his statements would require months of investigation rather than the few days which have so far been available in connection with this

# Chemical and Engineering

# NEWS

PUBLISHED BY THE  
AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY

1155 SIXTEENTH STREET, N. W.  
WASHINGTON 6. D. C.

WALTER J. MURPHY  
EDITOR

January 24, 1949

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

Dear Dr. Kehoe:

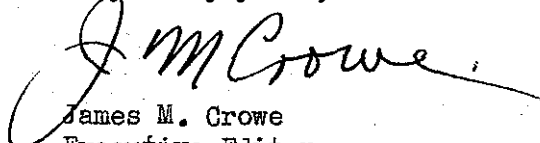
Thank you for your letter of January 12th. I found your comments on the Donora situation very interesting. Undoubtedly, there are many extremely difficult questions to be cleared up in a case like this, and I sincerely hope that the thorough investigations now under way will find the answers.

The problems of air pollution are becoming more and more important in industrial areas of our country and warrant serious attention. Many of the problems are technical in nature and will require much work by all branches of science and engineering.

We have called attention to these problems on several occasions in editorials and articles in both CHEMICAL AND ENGINEERING NEWS and INDUSTRIAL AND ENGINEERING CHEMISTRY. Also helping to disseminate information and technical data concerning air pollution is the Division of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry of the American Chemical Society. At its next meeting, San Francisco, March 27-April 1, this Division will present a symposium of about 21 papers on the subject, "Atmospheric Contamination and Purification." At a later date when I have a final copy of the program, I will send you a list of the papers and authors with the thought that you might find the information useful.

In view of your comments on the Donora situation, I was quite surprised to see in the New York Times a report of the statements of Dr. Clarence A. Mills, head of the Department of Experimental Medicine in the College of Medicine of the University of Cincinnati. I am attaching a photostat of the Times story. This seems to give the impression that there is some divergence of opinion at the University of Cincinnati.

Very truly yours,

  
James M. Crowe  
Executive Editor

JMC:OJ  
Enclosure

January 27, 1949

Mr. James M. Crowe,  
Executive Editor,  
Chemical and Engineering News,  
1155 Sixteenth Street, N.W.,  
Washington 6, D. C.

Dear Mr. Crowe:

I appreciate very much your letter of January 24, and particularly your information about the symposium in San Francisco in March. I am sure we will find the information of considerable interest, and although I am by no means certain that any of us could attend this symposium, we shall give careful consideration to it. I think I should also comment on the last paragraph of your letter concerning Dr. Mills' statements and the "divergence of opinion at the University of Cincinnati."

If you will re-examine what I have said, you will find that I have not questioned the seriousness of the Donora tragedy. Its implications in relation to the public health are not new considerations in our thinking in this Laboratory. So far as I know, the work going on in this Laboratory for the past two years represents the only systematic effort that has ever been made to appraise the contamination of the atmosphere of cities in an extensive manner. I am familiar with the work that has been done in Los Angeles, since I have discussed some of this work with the people involved before it was started, and have been in touch with them from time to time since. We have systematically gathered the information in this field over a period of years, and by reason of our relationships to a number of industrial community problems of this type, we are aware of the economic and social significance of the situation, insofar as evidence is available concerning it. We do not take this problem lightly. The tragedy which happened at Donora has happened in other places, specifically in the Meuse Valley in Belgium, for one example. In fact, I think we take the matter more seriously than almost any other experimental group, and we have not failed to bring it to the attention of persons who have reason to be interested in the problem. My criticism of the things that have been said in the public press is not that they are magnifying the seriousness of a problem, but rather that they are talking about it as though they knew what to do about it, which is far from being the case. It may be that the tragedy was due in large part to fluorine. That, however, is a guess, and it is not right to guess about such a matter. By the same token the comments of Dr. Mills in this situation may be correct, but for my money, they are not based on the evidence that enables us to appreciate the situation, or to know how to deal with it. Dr. Mills is entitled to his own

Mr. James M. Crowe - (2) - January 27, 1949

opinions, and I am sure that he will express them where and when he wishes. He is not a member of our staff, and we are not responsible for his opinions. We are engaged in the laborious and costly work of obtaining the facts from which sound conclusions can be drawn, and out of which specific remedies can be recommended. I believe it is fair to say that we have done more work on this problem of air pollution from industrial wastes than any other organized research group in this country. We may not be very bright, since we do not know the answers, whereas other people do. I am not differing with anyone at this stage of the game in an expression of opinion. I am just not expressing an opinion until I have evidence with which to back it up. It is very difficult to avoid newspaper publicity if one has any connection whatever with matters of this type. Nevertheless, we have steadfastly adopted the policy of working hard, informing ourselves as well as possible and speaking little until we can speak to the point.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Kehoe, M. D.

RAK ef