

Tacoma Investigations

Your safety is our number one concern.



Independent Mathematical Contractors, Inc.
ADMC BB 106
Tacoma, WA 98402

May 7, 2008

Dear IMC:

I write to you concerning one Mr. Joseph Merton of Ruston, WA. I regret to tell you that Mr. Merton is currently undergoing treatment for a case of lead poisoning, suspected intentional. He requested that I communicate with you regarding the particulars of the situation, and specifically requested that I involve you in our investigation. Under normal circumstances, departmental policies would dictate that I refuse to accede to such requests, as they might interfere with ongoing police inquiries. In this instance, however, I admit to being baffled and will gratefully accept any assistance you might be able to lend, in the role of outside expert consultant, of course.

The facts of the case are these. Approximately 6 months ago, on the 31st of October, Mr. Merton received set of 6 ceramic earthenware mugs from an unknown source. The card sent with them, which we have in our possession, says merely, "from an old friend. Here. You deserve them." The card was unsigned. Since then, Mr. Merton has made it his daily habit to use these cups for his morning coffee.

Recently, Mr. Merton began to experience abdominal pain and irritability followed by lethargy and slurred speech, typical symptoms of lead poisoning. He was examined by his regular physician, who found him to have a lead-level of 60 mg/dL in his blood. (For a man of Mr. Merton's size this signifies that he has a total of .033 grams of lead in his blood and tissues). His physician immediately admitted Mr. Merton into Tacoma General and simultaneously contacted me.

I had forensics search Mr. Merton's residence and his place of work for possible sources of lead contamination, and they identified the aforementioned mugs. I have since been made aware that many ceramic glazes traditionally used to contain lead, although modern regulations and protections have virtually eliminated such glazes from commercial products. Forensics estimates that these particular mugs leech 795 mg (or 0.00795 g) lead into a cup of coffee, and concludes from this that they were not mass-manufactured. These mugs were handmade.

It is Mr. Merton's unsubstantiated opinion that these mugs were made by a former college roommate of his, one Mr. Jack Phaze. It seems that these two men had a falling-out some years earlier, and Merton alleges that Phaze harbors a vendetta over this incident. We detained Mr. Phaze briefly for questioning; he denies making the mugs, although he admits to having used lead-based glazes in his ceramic sculptures

Mr. Phaze did raise an interesting point, however. He claims that the quantities of lead involved would be insufficient to raise Mr. Merton's blood lead-levels to their current level, because the human body eliminates lead in proportion to the amount present. His point is that there must be other sources of lead that our Forensics department has failed to discover.

Mr. Merton's physician confirmed this statement, or rather, part of it. She explained that when an adult subject ingests lead, only 15% is absorbed, and this goes directly into the blood and tissues. From there some 0.39% per day is transferred into the skeleton, and some 3.22% per day is eliminated through urine, feces, and sweat. Although some amount of lead deposited in the bones leeches back into the bloodstream, the amount of this transference is negligible unless the subject takes medication.

She assures me that it is the lead deposited in the bones that is deadly, because it is so difficult to remove. She also explained that the lead count on Mr. Merton does not take into account the amount of lead in his bones—indeed, she can not determine this amount precisely without expensive diagnostic tests.

Mr. Merton believes that you can succeed where others have failed. Even if we succeed in tying Phaze to the mugs, we have no evidence that these alone are sufficient to account for Mr. Merton's elevated lead levels. And Mr. Merton is somehow convinced that you can determine the lead level in his bones, even though his physician can not. He says, and I quote:

"Tell them that the change in bone level is the blood level, and that the change in blood level is intake minus output. They can solve it from there."

I sincerely hope that he is right. As time is of the essence, please submit a personnel roster and preliminary findings by May 23 and a final report by June 2.

Sincerely,

Officer Sonia Kovalevskia