Book reviews

plastics. Another interesting chapter is on dermatitis in the forest products industry. Inevitably, poison ivy dermatitis is described at length, not a relevant problem in the United Kingdom but of considerable general interest.

Dermatologists working in occupational dermatoses will probably find this book useful for reference and helpful when dealing with cases of contact dermatitis where the causative agent is particularly difficult to identify.

MURIEL NEWHOUSE

Textbook of occupational medicine. Edited by J K Howard and F H Tyer. (Pp 509; £60.) Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1987.

In most branches of medicine there is a spectrum of books ranging from authoritative text books on the one hand that are used only for reference to more didactic, easily portable volumes that are used from day to day. There are, however, plenty in the middle and it is into the middle that Howard and Tyer's book falls since it certainly is not a comprehensive text book.

There has been a spate of middle range books on occupational medicine of late and I have to say that I do not think that the present one adds anything important to the list and it is somewhat pricier than many.

The authors have had the admirable intent of covering as wide a range of topics as they could but they have stinted on space so that their contributors are not able to do justice to their subject, certainly not in the way which one would like to see in a text book. I can see that this book might be used for those studying for the AFOM or some similar examination unless they chose to use one of the cheaper alternatives which would do them almost as well. I do not see it being used at all as a reference volume.

There are several errors of commission in the book—one I disliked particularly was the confusion of Legge's first name—but the book suffers mostly from errors of omission. The chapter on chemical hazards is too skimpy to be really useful and so is the one on statistics. Another feature that may limit the appeal of the book is its parochial nature; some of the chapters at the beginning of the book deal with occupational health law and practice in the UK but have little to say about the situation elsewhere.

This book has been a long time in the making and we have heard about its appearance for many months. I am sorry to have to say that I was disappointed when it finally arrived and I cannot recommend it with any enthusiasm.

H A WALDRON

Prevention of neurotoxic illness in working populations. Edited by B L Johnson. Published for WHO by John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 1987.

Small books written by 50 contributors seldom turn out to be as readable as this which is a considerable recommendation to the editor. Anyone who wishes to make a start in occupational neurotoxicology would do well to begin here since the book reviews most of present knowledge concisely and with a great many references. Different approaches to the study of neurotoxic illness in the workplace are given and the chapter on epidemiological methods is a model of its type.

The sections on test methods concentrate rather too heavily on symptom questionnaires and psychological tests, reflecting the tendency to base what is often a psychiatric diagnosis—as in the case of the so called solvent induced organic syndromes—on the results of the subject's subjective impression or his performance in psychometric tests rather than on a proper psychiatric evaluation. Throughout the book there is a notable lack of psychiatric input to balance that of the epidemiologists, neurologists, and psychologists; mention should have been given to case finding instruments such as the general health questionnaire or to the present state examination.

What is also lacking is any sense of how serious a matter neurotoxic illness really is among people at work. Judging from the papers that have appeared in this journal over the past five years or so, it is neither common nor grave. Or am I misjudging the issue entirely? There is no doubt that it has considerable survival value for many academically based epidemiologists but I wonder how far it impinges on either the workers themselves or those who have responsibility for their day to day care either at work or elsewhere?

Nevertheless, this is a useful addition and one which will no doubt set off several hounds in search of neurotoxic hares.

H A WALDRON

Work-related lung disorders. Edited by J E Cotes and J Steel. (£65.) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1987.

It is an interesting idea to have a book on occupational lung disease written jointly by a physician and a hygienist but in doing so the authors seem slightly to have obscured their target. Reading it, I was not clear who would benefit most. It is extremely clear and lucid, however, and one cannot say that for many text books these days, and it does give the proper emphasis, concentrating less on the classic diseases and more on those seen in the modern workplace.