Natural and man-made mineral fibres: UK research priorities. By the INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH. Report of workshops held 14th October 1994 and 11 January 1995. Report R3. (Pp 126; price £25.) 1995. Leicester: Institute of Environment and Health. ISBN 1-899110-03-8.

Experimental research on mineral fibre toxicology goes back a long way in the United Kingdom. Pioneering studies of animal exposure to asbestos were carried out by Beattie in Sheffield in 1912, by Stewart in Leeds, and by Kettle at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London in the 1930s, and tissue culture studies with asbestos were carried out by Belt, Friedmann, and King at Hammersmith in London in the late 1930s and early 1940s. A flourishing programme of research studying a range of mineral fibres was conducted by Wagner and Timbrell in the 1960s and 1970s under the Medical Research Council (MRC) until their unit was disbanded.

This report was commissioned by the MRC Committee on Toxic Hazards in the Environment and Workplace, to advise its Physiological Medicine and Infections Board on priority areas for research in the field of mineral fibres. It is the fruit of two days of workshops at the Institute for Environment and Health. (The MRC is to be congratulated. How did it get agreement for an Institute for Environment and Health (a Phoenix born out of Lawther's and Connors' units?), while there is still opposition to the establishment of a much needed National Institute for Health?) The workshop report, constituting a quarter of the booklet, considers the extent of the problem and the research needs, and makes recommendations for the United Kingdom research programme.

The main portion is an appendix made up of a series of reviews of research on mineral fibres and the identification of gaps in knowledge. The discussions and conclusions are wise and predictable. This booklet was preceded by a number of reviews including the following:

World Health Organisation (Europe). *Conferences on man-made mineral fibre*. April 1982 and October 1986. Geneva: WHO, 1982 and 1986.

International Programme on Chemical Safety. *Man-made mineral fibres*. Geneva: WHO, 1988. (Environmental Health Criteria 77.)

International Agency for Research on Cancer. *Man-made mineral fibres and radon*. *LARC Monogr* 1988;43.

International Agency for Research on Cancer. CEC initiative. Non-occupational exposure to mineral fibres. *LARC Sci Publ* 1989;90.

World Health Organisation (Europe). *Indoor air quality EHC. Inorganic fibres and other particulate matter*. Geneva: WHO, 1991.

The unequivocal message from these reports was that the problem required a broad programme of research overlapping other interests, and would involve cooperation on an international scale. Although printed some time ago their advice has not been overtaken by events. One wonders what different advice the MRC expected. The studies of Mearl Stanton corresponded with a flowering of research on fibre toxicology: his death coincided with changes in the political, scientific, and economic climates,

which led to the closure of units and have militated against national programmes of study let alone international ones. The present state of ignorance on important aspects of fibre toxicity is our legacy.

MORRIS GREENBERG

Asbestos: medical and legal aspects. 4th ed. By BARRY I CASTLEMAN. (Pp 950; price \$110.00.) 1996. New Jersey: Aspen Law and Business. ISBN 1-56706-275-X.

The author's aim in this publication, primarily addressed to people engaged in litigation, has been to provide a global and comprehensive account of the development of the asbestos industry and of the knowledge on asbestos diseases. It is based on a review of material that has been published or obtained by legal discovery. Recent legal discovery, having thrown open such volumes of papers not previously available for study, has justified a new edition. Although physically a slimmer volume, it includes a further 200 pages in an attempt to keep abreast of the situation, and continues its attractive format. Members of the flourishing and lucrative United States asbestos litigation industry will get a good read for their money, although they will be left in no doubt that it is not an apologia for the industry. People wishing to acquaint themselves with the literature will find that it has useful bibliographies.

Those who mispent their youth seeing too many American B films and reading too much pulp literature of the "politician, scandal, horror, shock" variety, and subsequently learnt that things ain't necessarily so, may be sceptical about an American expose (good enough for the New Yorker). However, take for example the account of Richard Schilling, an earlier illustrious editor of the original *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* and the request for him not to publish Doll's paper on lung cancer in asbestos workers, and the scheming to have Doll or the Medical Research Council withdraw the paper. The documentation is now available, as it is for several other events. Suppressed research results, and the machinations of gamekeepers turned poachers, are documented and exposed to daylight. Those people unfamiliar with the field may have been led to think that the asbestos problem is a matter of purely historical interest. Unfortunately it is not. The developed world has vastly reduced its asbestos consumption (although it still has its legacy from past usage), but the developing world has replaced it as a major user.

The reader, whether new to the field or an old hand, will get a lot of information from this edition. However, unless gifted with a high degree of sensitivity, the reader will not get a full sense of the stupidity and wickedness that comes over when handling actual documents concerned in this saga. The historical side is selective of the individual people whose contributions to our knowledge and ignorance of matters asbestos are discussed and the index is somewhat sparse. (Where are the Beatties, Grieve, Smither, Corbett McDonald?) Historical accuracy requires more detailed evaluation of the roles of the players in the drama than would seem to be possible within the constraints of this volume.

MORRIS GREENBERG

NOTICES

1997 Continuing education: sponsored by NIOSH

7-10 January. Cincinnati, OH. Basic instructor course in occupational safety and health standards for the construction industry (OSHA 500).

14-17 January. St Paul, MN. Occupational safety and health standards for the construction industry (OSHA 510). 25-28 February. St Paul, MN. 4-7 November. Cincinnati, OH.

28-31 January. St Paul, MN. Guide to voluntary compliance in the industrial hygiene area (OSHA 521). 17-20 March. Cincinnati, OH.

28-31 January. St Paul, MN. Electrical standards (OSHA 309A). 13-16 October. Cincinnati, OH.

10-13 February. Cincinnati, OH. Hazardous materials (OSHA 201A). 24-27 March. St Paul, MN.

8-11 April. St Paul, MN. Collateral duty course for other federal agencies (OSHA 600). 21-24 July. Cincinnati, OH.

10-13 June. St Paul, MN. Machinery and machine guarding standards (OSHA 204A). 9-12 September. Cincinnati, OH.

22-25 July. St Paul, MN. Principles of ergonomics (OSHA 225).

9-12 September. St Paul, MN. A guide to voluntary compliance in safety and health (OSHA 501). 9-12 December. Cincinnati, OH.

Further information from: Midwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety, Program in Continuing Education, University of Minnesota, 640 Jackson Street, St Paul, MN 55101, (612) 221-3992. Web Site Url: <http://www.healthpartners.com/mcohs/mcohs.html>

Molecular advances in cancer epidemiology and prevention. 20-22 February 1997. Sheraton Palace Hotel, San Francisco, California

This programme provides an overview of developments in biomolecular research that have defined the fundamental mechanisms of carcinogenesis in human populations, and which point the way to innovative approaches to cancer epidemiology and prevention. The programme will focus on applications of molecular diagnostics for identifying human exposures to carcinogenic hazards, new techniques for detecting genetically susceptible people, and screening high risk cancer populations. The programme is designed for physicians and researchers in the disciplines of epidemiology, genetics, pathology, molecular biology, and public health.

The format features lectures and discussion with faculty. Major topics to be covered include:

- Disease pathways and gene products
- Mutational spectra: insights into causation and prognosis
- Breast cancer screening: controversy and promise of molecular markers
- Highly penetrant cancer susceptibility genes
- Genetic modifiers and gene-environment interaction