
This is a very comprehensive overview of the whole area of occupational health and safety in the United States, written by an author with qualifications in chemistry and law. It must be stressed that it is a review of the scene in the USA as the section on the foreign experience, though interesting, is comparatively short. Much of the book is concerned with legal issues of which a considerable component, such as Federal versus State is of purely domestic interest to the USA or is likely to interest only those who wish to study comparative law.

The author’s technique of writing resembles that of the film director who gives us the longshot, in this case the Summary, then the medium shot, the Introduction and finally a series of close ups, the main text of the Report. This is useful for those who wish to read at only one level, such as Summary, Introduction or main text but the repetition of matter in exactly the same words produces a sense of déjà vu in the reader who goes through it from beginning to end.

The author’s main case is that the United States is the world leader in technological development but lags behind other countries in measures designed to safeguard health and safety. In the US (and this clearly applies in some measure at least to other countries) it is easier to take measures to deal with accidents than with hazards to health. The former are internalised in that they clearly occur in the organisation and the costs, including workman’s compensation, have to be borne by the organisation. With disease it is far harder to identify the cause and the employee may have left the job years before symptoms develop.

According to estimates published in the book, industrially induced diseases kill about seven times as many people in America as are killed by industrial accidents. Unfortunately, exact data on the incidence, causes and consequences of industrial diseases are lacking. Ashford believes that preventive occupational medicine is an activity which scarcely exists in the United States.

He very ably analyses the tensions which in a market economy impel management and unions alike to gloss over the hazards which lead to disease, whereas they cannot so readily ignore accidents.

British readers will find Section 2, 'The Nature and Dimensions of Occupational Health and Safety Problems' and Section 12, ‘Agricultural Workers, A Special Case’ most pertinent.

V. C. MARSHALL

Legal Rights and Duties in Medical and Nursing Service. By M. H. Whincup. (Pp. 54; £8.50 hard cover, £6.50 soft cover.) Ravenswood Publications: Beckenham. 1976.

This little book is No. 5 in the series Studies in Health Service Management Law and Practice. Any lawyer perusing the Table of Contents will realise at once the extremely wide ground which Mr Whincup seeks to cover. There are only three chapters, but they deal with Security of Employment, Safety of Employment and Premises, and the Practitioner’s Duties, any one of which is the subject of large tomes (indeed encyclopaedias). The approach is therefore necessarily rather compressed, but it must be said that, to this reviewer, the language was readable and the law stated accurately. Mr Whincup apparently possesses the enviable gift of being able to take large masses of complex and sometimes controversial doctrine and to expound it in a way which means something to the layman yet does not offend the expert.

The book must therefore be welcomed as a very valuable aid to all who work in the Health Services as doctors or nurses. The only reservation must be the price, which for what is a quite slim volume, seems rather inordinately steep, even by today’s standards of steepness.

D. W. ELLIOTT


This book forms part of a series on 'Environmental Studies' and is in spite of its title concerned with the effects of electromagnetic fields on man. The theme of the book is that man may be adversely affected by the electromagnetic fields he produces, to which possibility the author draws our attention through his phrase 'electrical pollution'. This is clearly not a happy choice of phrase, since the occasionally beneficial effects of such fields, which the author properly stresses, correspond to no common use of the word pollution. The book is commended to 'environmentalists, ecologists, nuclear scientists, electronic engineers and medical students', as a 'timely warning on the growing effects of electromagnetism'.

What, then, are the growing effects of electromagnetism? Beginning with a study of the important sources of electromagnetic fields, the author treats us to an interesting and wide-ranging account of the reported phenomena associated with fields from DC to microwave frequencies (300 GHz). The reader who wishes to ascertain how hazardous his own particular involvement with electromagnetic radiation is, will probably remain unsatisfied after reading the book, since the literature on which it is based is often self-contradictory and no attempt has been made to resolve these contradictions. The overall impression however is that, apart from certain recognised and generally appreciated phenomena, the electrical pollution to which the general public is exposed may be safely ignored.

There are certain specific criticisms that may be made of this book. Even within the restricted scope outlined in the preface, some surprising omissions may be noted.
There is no reference to radiation of frequency above 300 GHz, although ionising radiations, for example, have a significant effect on human tissue. The author’s limited perspective is illustrated by his statement ‘electromagnetism is invisible’, and makes the book of doubtful value to nuclear scientists!

The author’s claim to present a ‘passionate and objective view of the subject’ is not endorsed by the style in which the book is written. Personal anecdotes (‘I can personally attest to its (diathermy’s) effectiveness’) are used freely, and a rather colourful style (‘would you believe . . .’) gives the impression occasionally not so much of a scientific text as of a popular magazine. There are several examples of rather loose writing such as, in a reference to the Bordeaux machine, the phrase ‘. . . human treatment of cancer’ which should presumably be ‘. . . treatment of human cancer’.

The chapter on ‘Regulatory Definitions’ contains a number of minor misprints and the misleading statement that the hazardous band of frequencies is from 50 to 60 Hz. Elsewhere, electrical field, field strength, field intensity and electrical charge potential are used synonymously.

This book may be recommended as a readable introduction to the effects of electromagnetic fields on man, to those who want a general acquaintance with this subject. Otherwise, it leaves much to be desired.

G. HARDING


In this book the usefulness and limitations are considered of methods of forecasting environmental health hazards arising from developments in chemical industries. The main substance of the report is in four sections; the first two of these deal with laboratory methods of identifying hazards and identification by observation of the health of the population, and with the type of information required. There is always a limit to the resources available to deal with the increasing number of environmental problems.

The next section draws attention to those problems considered to be of high priority such as the effects of power production, metals, photo-sensitisers and pesticides. In the last section fifteen recommendations are listed. These are addressed to both the WHO and member states. Many of the recommendations could well be considered by individuals, university departments and industrial organisations with a view to organising their own contribution.

The remaining two-thirds of the book consists of seven annexes in which the high priority topics are considered in greater detail. Among this information there is an account of the relevant data banks in the USA, and the tabular presentation of health and environmental hazards associated with alternative forms of power production is especially useful.

The international study group which prepared this report collected information from many sources. The result is a readable and thought-provoking account that contains something of interest to most people concerned with the environment. More particularly those involved in the study and control of occupational medicine will wish to consider this report. Some will be informed by the report, others will find it a useful reminder and yet others may use it as a check-list for areas of concern and action.

D. H. NAPIER


This collection of 25 papers (all in English) summarises the proceedings of the 3rd International Symposium on Night- and Shiftwork, held in Dortmund in 1974, under the auspices of the Subcommittee on Shiftwork of the Permanent Commission and International Association on Occupational Health. The first symposium (1969) was especially concerned with shiftworking and morbidity; the second (1971) placed emphasis on its psychological and social aspects. The meeting reported here concentrates ‘on laboratory and field studies of the various forms of shiftworking’. Papers mainly concern sleep deprivation and disturbance, and the adaptation of physiological and performance functions under both laboratory and field conditions.

In their introduction the authors suggest that before one can confidently advise individuals and organisations on shiftworking problems ‘it is necessary to study shiftwork first in the laboratory under controlled conditions so that we can establish basic principles’. And they add that they ‘would like the symposium to be seen as a step towards the formulation of a programme of laboratory research’. Although they do also stress that such a programme should be ‘relevant to real-life problems’, it would be interesting to know to what extent their view was wholly accepted by participants.

An alternative view is that concurrently with experimental studies in the laboratory, equal research time and effort should be devoted to carefully-conducted studies under working conditions outside. A supplementary line of attack might be the regular collection, preferably in a form standardised internationally, of details of current practice in the arrangement of working hours. At present we have little systematic information of this kind. The justification for this dual approach is that problems differ in their amenability to laboratory or outside-laboratory investigation. This applies whether one’s concern is with particular effects of particular shift patterns, or with different forms of individual adaptation.

In this connection it is also worth remembering that, in this country at least, we are dealing with two broad categories of personnel on abnormal arrangements of working hours. The first consists of those in such process industries as glass and steel manufacture, who are employed fairly consistently on shiftworking, and even on shiftwork of a particular type, for a considerable period of their working lives. But for very many more, experience of shift- and night-working is a much more inconsistent and erratic business, partial or seasonal, or involving perhaps the odd emergency night shift and the occasional marathon stint. It may be that a laboratory approach is more suited to a study of the problems of the second category than of the first.

Since discussions following papers are often the best part of meetings of this kind, a somewhat fuller account of their main directions would have been welcome here. Conclusions and suggestions for future action are rather tantalisingly compressed into a single page.

R. SERGEAN


In the preface to his book, the author states that ‘this is still a handbook intended as a quick reference guide’, and it is exactly what he states. The print is large and the information given is concise, clear, easily understandable and up to