

considered. Some of the proposed solutions sound fanciful and desperate, such as covering mercury deposits in waterways with crushed automobile bodies, with plastic film rolled out and pinned on the bottom of water courses, or with a layer of condensed feathers, a tonne of which would complex one pound of mercury. There is a good chapter on the development of legislation against mercury pollution in the United States and the problems posed to the federal Environmental Protection Agency and to state agencies in its enforcement. The complex interaction between industrial, political and public interest is well illustrated. The biological aspects of mercury contamination are less well covered, however, and the medical reader may be irritated by some clinical inaccuracies and by such terms as 'negative symptoms'.

The problem of mercury in the environment illustrates the principle, and this is brought out in the book, that the industrial use of a toxic material cannot be considered in isolation but must involve the local community which it purports to serve, and even the population as a whole. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974) in this country makes some provision for this, and it remains to be seen how effectively our environment can be protected in the future.

This book would be of value to the reader who wishes to obtain a general idea of the social and political problems posed by mercury pollution. There are also 537 references. G. KAZANTZIS

The Back Book. By Maggie Lettvin. (Pp. 160; £4.50). Souvenir Press: London. 1978

There is no doubt that the protection of the back from strain plays a very important part in the management of low back pain and, if carried out meticulously, often results in considerable improvement in symptoms.

This American book is written with two objects, first, to analyse the type and location of the pain and its relationship to various activities. This is done in the form of a questionnaire and pain time chart which, when filled in, would be useful to the doctor seeing the patient, especially a rheumatologist, orthopaedic surgeon or industrial medical officer. The second object, following this analysis, is to show the sufferer from low back pain correct ways to move, sit, stand, lie and lift and also how to carry out every possible activity of daily living, even including sexual intercourse, in ways

that will avoid hurting the back. This is done in considerable detail, illustrated with plentiful diagrams. Some exercise regimes are included with the very appropriate warning that they should be done only if they do not cause pain. It also deals briefly with such things as analgesics, spinal fusion and gynaecological aspects.

I believe that for the intelligent patient this book will provide a lot of useful information. I would disagree with only a few minor points in the text, particularly the suggestion that low back pain is affected by wet, cold or draughts, a somewhat dated concept. Although rather an awkward size, it is neatly set out, easy to follow and not expensive to buy.

A. ZINOVIEFF

The Guide to Hygiene and Sanitation in Aviation. By J. Bailey. (Pp. 162; 28.00 Sw. fr.). WHO: Geneva. 1977.

Nearly 20 years have passed since the Guide to Hygiene and Sanitation in Aviation was first published, during which time little has remained unchanged or unchallenged within the aviation industry, other than those basic principles which have governed its various activities. It is these basic principles as applied to hygiene that the new edition of the guide has restated and clothed in a wealth of accurate and factual advice and, as a result, a very good book has been produced. Moreover, it is one which gives practical advice in sufficient detail to be useful without producing that degree of complication which will deter the faint-hearted, as can so easily happen.

The Guide is intended to be used in conjunction with the IATA Code of Practice which itself became available two years ago and together they constitute just that degree of guidance which is required. Both are complementary and while basic concepts are identical there are, between the two publications, some inevitable differences in emphasis. Probably the most important of these is the emphasis placed by the writers of the IATA Manual on the paramount importance of storage of food between production and consumption. This is also emphasised in the present Guide but the process of 'time stamping' which IATA recommended has not been taken up. This is not always an easy practice to enforce but it does have very great advantages which can safeguard this most crucial period as can no other procedure. Date stamping is now an accepted part of retail food distribution

and sale, and time stamping could most usefully be adopted in airline catering work.

However, both as a work of reference (in which it is helped by an adequate index) and as a manual of practice it is a measure of the Guide's worth that only small criticisms can be advanced. On the credit side some passages can be singled out as of outstanding worth and it would be difficult to express almost all that is best in food preparation techniques as succinctly as has been achieved in Section 4.6. Here and there the presence of correcting hands can be discerned but, on the whole, it is an eminently readable book. What a pity a 170-page paperback has to cost nearly £8! P. J. C. CHAPMAN

Isocyanates in Industry—Operating and Medical Codes of Practice. A Report of the Isocyanate Subcommittee, Health Advisory Commission. (Pp. 84; £4.50; BRMA members £3.00; EEC £5.00). British Rubber Manufacturers' Association Limited. 1977.

The British Rubber Manufacturers' Association has good reason to be proud of this publication which is a model of its kind. It is a revised and improved edition of a booklet which first appeared in 1971, and which was almost entirely concerned with toluene diisocyanate (TDI) alone.

Both medically and technologically the diisocyanates constitute one of the most interesting groups of chemicals in industrial use today. The very real medical problems associated with industrial exposure have been the subject of much comment, frequently ill-informed, in both the lay and the technical press. From time to time suggestions have been made that the isocyanates are too hazardous for industrial use. This Code of Practice gives an adequate description of the hazards and biological properties, both of TDI and other important isocyanates, and even more important, gives a detailed account of the measures needed for medical surveillance and to ensure safety in use. It describes proper storage requirements, the design of polyurethane production plant, proper fume extraction, the advisability of scrubbing systems, personal protective equipment, atmospheric monitoring, sound operating practices, and information for employees. The trade names of various isocyanate compounds are given, their chemical and physical properties, and their suppliers. Also listed are the names and addresses of suitable spirometers, respirators and other protective equipment, atmospheric monitoring de-