insignificant); one individual was allergic to mice and one to guinea pigs and IgE antibodies to allergens from these species were not tested; two had skin reactions only (one very mild) and two had mild nasal symptoms only. We would also emphasise that this retrospective group was chosen from individuals who in a previous survey had reported allergic symptoms and our comments about increased antibody levels referred only to this group and should not be taken to indicate that the statement is necessarily true of a larger, controlled population. Even with this proviso our results do not support the statements made by Newman Talor *et al* in their abstract that "these findings suggest that the immunological mechanisms responsible for asthmatic reactions to laboratory animals are different from those involved in rhinitis and urticaria."¹

We fail to see the point of the last paragraph of their letter. There was no intention to conceal anything. The prospective group is, as stated, a clearly defined population of individuals during their first year of employment. We agree that it is crucial to know if those with specific IgE are at particular risk of developing asthma, and this is one of the reasons for the continuing study referred to in our paper. Slovak and Newman Taylor seem to be reading more into our results than is justified from the defined nature of the study. We also agree that the development of specific IgE could become a valuable monitor and that skin prick test conversion may be a significant marker. We are seeking scientific evidence for these assertions.

We should further point out that although our observations were "made on a volunteer sample" there was a 100% response; all individuals who began employment during the study period agreed to take part.

References

- ¹ Newman-Taylor AJ, Myers JR, Longbottom JL, Spackman D, Slovak AJM. Immunological differences between asthma and other allergic reactions in laboratory workers. *Thorax* 1981;**36**:229.

Book reviews

IARC monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risk of Chemicals to Humans. Vol 31: *Some Food Additives, Feed Additives and Naturally Occurring Substances*. (Pp 314; \$30.00.) Vol 32: *Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocarbons, part 1, Chemical, Environmental and Experimental Data*. (Pp 477; \$40.00.) Vol 33: *Polynuclear Aromatic Hydrocar-*

bons, part 2, Carbon Blacks, Mineral Oils and some Nitroarenes. (Pp 245; \$25.00.) Lyon, International Agency for Research on Cancer, (distributed by the World Health Organisation), 1983.

The IARC monographs will need no introductory description for anyone with an interest in chemical carcinogenesis. It would be superfluous to undertake an evaluative review of publications of this type, which summarise the conclusions of expert evaluation panels. Nevertheless, since these works constitute one of the most important information resources on carcinogenesis, the appearance of these titles will be noted alongside other reviews, with a brief indication of the subjects covered.

Volume 31 covers a diverse range of additives and other substances that may be present by design or accident in food for human or animal consumption. Apart from various antibiotics, preservatives, and similar materials, there are several interesting natural compounds in the list, including intrinsic components: cholesterol and flavonoids such as quercetin, for example. Pyrolysis products, and fungal metabolites such as T₂ trichothecene, were also considered. In addition to their possible importance as dietary ingredients and occupational agents for the food industry, readers of this journal might care to speculate whether such chemicals have any interactions with toxic or carcinogenic substances of occupational origin.

Volumes 32 and 33 deal with the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons: as befits a group of compounds which include some of the earliest known and most extensively studied chemical carcinogens, a substantial body of information is provided. Forty two hydrocarbons and six heterocyclic compounds present in the environment are reviewed, to add to a previous series considered by the IARC in 1973. The subjects of volume 33 include several materials of more complex composition, such as oils and carbon black, that may be of interest in an occupational context. Some nitroarenes are also considered; many combustion processes seem to generate both these and the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

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Short and thin mineral fibres Identification, exposure, and health effects. Proceedings from a symposium. EJ Chatfield, PC Elmes, H Muhle, F Pott, and FD Pooley. (No price given.) Solna; National Board of Occupational Safety and Health Research Department, 1983.

These four invited lectures were given by recognised