Book reviews

Environmental Health Criteria: No 26 **Styrene** (pp 123, Sw Fr 12.) (1983); 28 **Acrylonitrile** (pp 125, Sw Fr 12.) (1983); 31 **Tetrachloroethylene** (pp 48, Sw Fr 7.) (1984); 32 **Methylene chloride** (pp 55, Sw Fr 8.) (1984); 33 **Epichlorohydrin** (pp 51, Sw Fr 8.) (1984); 34 **Chlordane** (pp 82, Sw Fr 10.) (1984); 42 **Tecnazene** (pp 23, Sw Fr 6.) (1984). IPCS International Programme on Chemical Safety. Geneva; World Health Organisation.

This series of booklets offers a convenient and up to date evaluation of the scientific evidence available on the topic considered. In most cases the review covers the toxicology and epidemiology relating to a single compound, and the series now includes several materials of industrial importance. A few reviews also deal with other things potentially affecting health—for example, radiation of certain classes: the recently issued volume No 35 (to be reviewed later) deals with extremely low frequency fields. Other volumes deal with techniques for evaluation of chemical agents, and for performing environmental epidemiological studies. In a few cases closely related groups of toxic materials, or mixtures that occur together as environmental contaminants, are considered. For each chemical, the toxicity and epidemiological effects are considered in relation to the uses and environmental occurrence of the material, including questions relating to transport, storage, and accidental or deliberate emissions. Applicable national and international safety and environmental quality standards are listed. Where problems of environmental contamination have been identified levels reported in the general environment and in occupational situations are reported. Available toxicological data on animal studies, and any information on effects in man, are summarised. The reviews of these data are necessarily brief, but full references are given throughout, so these volumes serve as useful sources of recent and relevant citations of scientific publications. The general reader would probably require more explanations and a less condensed style, but for anyone familiar with safety evaluation of chemicals these small volumes would be useful as an introduction to a particular chemical. The treatment of the subject material is categorised in a detailed table of contents, but there is no index, which is a pity. One of the problems of the structure of the series whereby compounds are considered individually is that there is no provision for easy comparison between different materials: clearly it is not intended to provide this, and the reader will go elsewhere for this information. Con-

sidering that these volumes are produced for rapid publication the quality of print (photographed from typescript) and construction is not bad: errors although not unknown are relatively infrequent.

In short, this series is useful as a reference for specialists in health, safety, and environmental aspects of industrial chemicals (and a few other related matters). The non-specialist would probably wish to consult more general works first but would then find these volumes useful since they are more complete and current in their area than any larger work could be.

A G SALMON

Toxic and Biomedical Effects of Fibres. By P Gross and D C Braun. (Pp x + 257 (no price given.) Park Ridge, New Jersey; Noyes Publications, 1984.

Another book on hazards of fibrous materials would not at first sight be welcome, except that the authors are well known for their distinguished work on this subject. Unfortunately, however, the expectation of excellence is not met.

After a brief introduction to the respiratory tract and its defence and clearance mechanisms, the text considers asbestos, talc, man-made vitreous fibres, other inorganic fibres, and organic fibres. This apparently comprehensive coverage is most unbalanced with 120 pages devoted to asbestos, a further 80 to man-made vitreous fibres, and only 30 to all other materials. For example, only 11 pages are devoted to byssinosis with virtually no mention of the pioneering work by R S F Schilling.

The lengthy section on asbestos is primarily a review of published reports with occasional interpretative comment, much of which appears to be concerned to underplaying the hazards of exposure to asbestos. Although the book was published in 1984, only three of the 157 references are dated after 1980, one in each of the next three years. The latest two both described important mortality studies, yet they were only discussed in relation to cancer of the larynx. This chapter also included no considerations or recommendations about control or threshold limit values for asbestos. Thus one must recommend instead the superb review of the hazards of asbestos by the Ontario Royal Commission¹ together with its logic for choosing differing control limits for differing exposure conditions.

The chapter on man-made vitreous fibres does include four references from 1981 and five from 1982. These last five, however, were all presented at the major World Health Organisation conference devoted entirely to these fibres at which a further 45 papers were also given. Among these were all those