
The conference unites people working in environmental epidemiology and exposure assessment to exchange information and synthesise ideas, about the methodology, results and applications of their research. It welcomes epidemiologists, exposure assessors, toxicologists, environmental health officials, and others interested in the field. The focus of this 7th ISSEE/5th ISEA conference will be on methodology to improve the assessment of the public health impact of environmental pollution at the (inter)national and regional level. Major symposia are foreseen on the following subjects:

- Integrating exposure assessment and epidemiological methods to improve study design in environmental epidemiology and health impact assessment
- Multi-center studies in environmental epidemiology: methodological aspects, and results of a number of recent studies conducted in Europe and elsewhere
- Uses of exposure assessment and environmental epidemiology in public health at the state, regional, and local level.

The programme will feature a number of oral and poster sessions on, among others, the following themes:

- Monitoring and surveillance
- Biological contaminants
- Exposure assessment
- Air pollution
- Environmental equity
- Risk assessment
- Genetic susceptibility
- Molecular epidemiology
- Water quality
- VOC
- Metals
- Multi-center studies
- Diversity of health effects
- Pesticides
- Hazardous wastes
- Motor vehicle emissions
- Chronic diseases
- Reproductive health
- Allergy and other immunological effects
- EMF
- Radon

For any inquiries or assistance, please contact the conference secretariat: Ms Susan Peelen, MSc, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Wageningen, PO Box 238, 6700 AE Wageningen, The Netherlands. Telephone: +31 8370 84124 Fax: +31 8370 82782 e-mail susan.peelen@medew.hogw.wau.nl.


Organised by the Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, in association with other bodies with an interest in medical education, this conference brings together the leaders of medical education in Europe. The programme is designed to be comprehensive and cover all specialities. It will explore areas of concern including finance, implementation, assessment, and re-certification. Speakers have been invited from all European Union countries and from the USA, Canada and Australia. There will be ample opportunity for free discussion and small group work. The conference language is English.

For further information please contact: Mrs Jean Coops, Conference Office, Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, 12 Chandos Street, London W1M 9DE. Tel: 44 (0) 171 636 6334; Fax: 44 (0) 171 436 2535.

BOOK REVIEW


The effects of modern war extend far beyond the immediate casualties and the obvious health effects of exposure to some of the chemical agents used in defensive or offensive roles. The possibility of there being long term health effects of the herbicides used in the Vietnam conflict was raised at an early stage and has been the subject of many investigations, both medical and scientific. This extensive volume encompasses a review of the pertinent scientific literature and draws conclusions as to the probability of American and allied troops having been affected by the massive spraying operations used in the defoliation of critical tracts of the Vietnamese forest.

The history of the controversy is outlined and indicates how the concerns about the use of Agent Orange developed to include the toxic contaminant 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD), which had been present in appreciable quantities in the herbicide preparations used at that time. There are summaries of the causes and effects of other environmental exposures to TCDD (at Seveso and Times Beach), which themselves resulted in considerable public concern. If this section of the book has a fault, it is that it relies too much on secondary sources, particularly other books that are not well referenced.

In the chapter that describes the military herbicide programme in Vietnam there is a clear reminder that, whatever the public perception, Agent Orange was but one component of a spectrum of preparations used. Purple, blue, pink, green and white were used in the war and, although they all were sprayed, it is not clear that the total Einsatz showed the volume of Agent Orange that was sprayed. This is reflected throughout the book in that there are sections devoted to each of the compounds in the mixtures, whether it be the TCDD contaminant, 2,4-D, 2,4,5-T, picloram or cacodylic acid. In many instances the sections are small or even non-existent. This reflects not the relative usage but the quantity of information available.

A toxicology chapter describes the studies that have been used to determine what effects should be sought in exposed people. Although thorough and generally accurate, there are errors. The statement that a single dose of TCDD cannot induce porphyria may be true for the rat, but is quite incorrect if applied to mice. It is surprising that the papers that would have contradicted this statement were not found in the detailed literature search described in one of the appendices.

In the epidemiological detection of health effects in a potentially exposed population two main factors have particular importance: the design and methodology of the studies and the assessment of exposure. Each of these is well discussed, the methodology section compares the development of exposure indices for Vietnam veterans with the direct analysis in current body lipid concentrations of TCDD and analogues as a measure of past exposure to the herbicides that contain 2,4,5-T. The conclusion that valid exposure indices may be generated from the available records must remain questionable.

The main part of the book is taken up with a review of the epidemiology: the exposure to herbicides environmentally or occupationally in manufacture or usage, the episodes of exposure to TCDD in the general environment or in factories. This is developed in specific sections that consider the health effects identified as having the most cause for concern: cancer, effects on the reproductive system, neurobehavioural disturbance. The conclusions are developed in each chapter and collected together in the executive summary. Unsurprisingly, the points are little different from those that have been made for each health effect individually in the scientific literature over the past 20 years. What must be remembered is that the association is with herbicides and not necessarily with any one compound in the mixture.

In conclusion, this is a valuable work on studies of the health effects that may be associated with exposure to the constituents of the herbicides used in Vietnam. It could well be read in conjunction with the recent EPA report on the sources and effects of the dioxins and analogues. The reference list is as up to date as could be expected and, with some notable absences, provide useful points of entry to the original literature.

J B GREGG