and cooking practices in impoverished communities, which is responsible for a massive burden of respiratory illness, contrast sharply with the concerns about possible health risks from low level exposures in western homes. Problems of air pollution in offices, industrial environments, and laboratories are also considered.

The hardback edition was first published in 1989 and it is perhaps inevitable therefore that, in a rapidly expanding field, some of the chapters are already starting to look dated. For example, important papers on the effects of nitrogen dioxide, such as the meta-analysis by Hasselblad et al., is not cited, nor is the recent Swedish study of risks of lung cancer from residential exposure to radon.

From a regulatory aspect, sections of the book dealing with problems and priorities are particularly useful. It is disappointing, therefore, that not all chapters have subheadings about these important aspects. As this is promised in the title it might have been helpful to have had an additional chapter on an overview of the subject that attempted to prioritise the main issues.

Finally, the chapter on environmental tobacco smoke should not pass without comment. This is a controversial subject where estimates of risks to health and regulatory policies are derived from imperfect data. These uncertainties are described in some detail and are used to cast doubt on the views of expert committees in the United Kingdom and the United States that environmental tobacco smoke is an important and avoidable source of sensory irritation, respiratory disease, and lung cancer (and perhaps cardiovascular disease) in exposed populations. In public health terms it is seen by many as a priority indoor pollutant for which action should be taken to reduce exposure. This is a view apparently not shared by the author.

Despite these criticisms, this book is a welcome addition to the publications on indoor air pollution. All of the main indoor air pollutants are covered, making it a valuable reference for those wishing to acquaint themselves rapidly with an important and expanding subject.

ANDREW WADGE


I started this book with high hopes and ended with disappointment. It quickly became apparent that this book has been put together from a series of articles mostly written about a decade ago and that there has been little editorial input into this volume. The result is that there is a lot of repetition. Let me give a few examples. Acrylamide, which is toxic if eaten unripe is mentioned in at least four places in the book. All these references to the fruit could have been collated into a simple paragraph and put into the chapter dealing with diet related disease. Again there are many references to the difficulties that may result from a doctor wishing to do a Vancouver on women from some eastern cultures. Why are these spread throughout the book instead of being located in a chapter on physical examinations? Even worse, the book is littered with stereotypes. Did you know that alcoholism is said to be common among the Irish, depression is said to be more common in Jews, British couples cannot have passionate events, Eastern husbands and wives speak only about important matters and adhere to the dictum think before you speak. There are many more examples of this sort. To Greeks raising an outstretched hand is a symbol of a curse. The Greeks must be having a terrible time in the European Union.

Some of the information given is misleading—for example, a picture on potatoes states that; “an excess of potatoes is as harmful as bread or sugar; potato starch is converted into glucose, surplus glucose is converted into fat and the excess fat is associated with the irritable heart disease ‘‘cachexia’’. All this is nearly correct but makes no distinction between complex carbohydrates and simple sugars. In any case anything in excess is probably bad for one’s health. I am sure the reader must take seriously statements such as; “virtually all Germans have health problems and if they don’t there must be something wrong with them,” taken from the Xenophobe’s Guide to the Germans. The context in which this statement is given, however, is very much in line with the rest of this cliché-ridden book.

Apparently this book is for inclusion in the reading list at the Royal Colleges. If this is then in my opinion there is something wrong. The book deals with a serious subject. I do not object to the attempt at the use of humour as a tool to emphasise a serious point but I do object to the rather silly story and the endless use of clichés. Somewhere within this pastiche a real book waits to emerge. Until that time I cannot recommend it except as light reading.

N LAZORUS


This is one of the latest in the well known series of IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) monographs. The book evaluates the carcinogenic risk to humans posed by exposure to 14 industrial chemicals—acrylamide, toluene, propylene oxide, isoprene, styrene, styrene-7,8-oxide, 4-vinylcyclohexene, 4-vinylcyclohexene dioxide, vinyl toluene, acrylamide, N-methylolacrylamide, methyl methacrylate, and 2-ethylhexyl acrylate. Several of these have considerable commercial importance as the building blocks of widely used polymers and copolymers, and because of this widespread use particular emphasis has been given to the risk of cancer in occupationally exposed workers, with details of available data on human exposure. Because of the wide range of uses, consumers may be exposed at much lower levels of these chemicals through food and the environment, so these evaluations have a wider relevance. For example, acrylamide monomer can occur in drinking water due to the use of acrylamide polymer in water purification.

Ten of the chemicals reviewed in this volume have been evaluated previously by IARC between 1972 and 1986. Justification for their reexamination is that a substantial amount of new data has become available. Also IARC modified its evaluation procedure in 1992, to allow more explicit consideration of the mechanisms of the carcinogenic process, and potential human carcinogenicity, on the basis of overall assessment of human carcinogenic risk. This has led to some recategorisation of compounds previously considered. Ethylene oxide has been upgraded to classification as a human carcinogen, on the basis of small but consistent excesses of lymphatic and haematopoietic cancer found in both human and animal studies, together with extensive evidence of its in vivo genotoxicity from in vitro evidence together with increased rates of chromosome aberrations and haemoglobin adducts in humans. 4-Vinylcyclohexene and 4-vinylcyclohexene dioxide have both been upgraded from unclassifiable to probable carcinogenic because of sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals that has been shown since they were last evaluated, however, there is no evidence from the supporting studies that this book is due to a mechanistic effect.

There is an extensive updated monograph on styrene, one of the most important monomers worldwide, which comes to the same overall assessment as when it was considered in 1979 and updated in 1987, that is styrene is probably carcinogenic to humans. This now uses the additional data on genetic and related effects, including evidence of chromosomal damage in exposed workers, which gives the assessment a firm scientific basis.

These reconsidered evaluations should be more realistic than those reached previously. Notably, because additional data available, but because the supporting data have been fully used to come to a more sound judgement on human carcinogenic potential based on a better assessment of the potential from human effects, where there is no adequate epidemiology on human cancer.

The agents not previously considered are isoprene, vinyl toluene, N-methylolacrylamide, and the 2-ethylhexyl acrylate. Acrylamide was classified as possibly carcinogenic to humans, and the other two compounds had insufficient data to be classifiable. Life term bioassay in laboratory animals indicated a lack of carcinogenicity for vinyl toluene, but as there were no human data, and vinyl toluene is an in vivo mutagen in mice, it was also assessed as not classifiable as carcinogenic.

Overall this monograph is up to IARC’s usual high standard and the inclusion of mechanistic and other toxicological data in the chemical and it forms a benchmark that evaluations more scientifically defensible and allows the reader to understand more clearly how the expert working group reached its overall conclusions.

ANNE MCDONALD

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