specialist chapter on pollution of drinking water quality and health has the merits of introducing the reader to such well debated topics as: nitrates and gastrointestinal cancer, water hardness and cardiovascular disease, and aluminium and Alzheimer's disease.

There are effectively seven chapters on air pollution. The United Kingdom, or at least European bias of many of these chapters, is understandable, but at times the very specific examples offered could make the book seem unnecessarily parochial to non-United Kingdom readers. A chapter on the effects of air pollution on trees and crops was suitably detailed. Road traffic is now seen as one of the most important sources of air pollution and an excellent chapter on this covers technical and sociological aspects in a vein that rightly questions issues such as inspection and maintenance programmes. The chapter on radiation did not seem to offer anything especially new, although it does give examples of individual releases. Both this chapter and the one on health effects of environmental chemicals were valuable because they covered incidents, whose outcome and investigation failed to be reported as avidly in the media as the initial event.

The chapter on the legal control of pollution was at once philosophical, yet balanced with detail on specific legislation.

Like any book with 20 chapters under different authorship; it is open to the criticism of unevenness in style and approach. And of course one yearns for synthesis, but I know that is too much to ask for here. We can all find particular gaps between the chapters, but students of environmental medicine will not fail to grasp the breadth of the field by reading this work. The expert will, no doubt, find it useful to have as a reference work in those less familiar areas. It represents a volume that is excellent value for money even for those who own the first edition. Evolution means that the third edition stands taller than most of its competitors.

P BRIMBLECOMBE

The Merck Index: 12th edition 1996. (\$US 25.) 1996. New York: Merck. ISBN 0911910-12-3.

The Merck Index is the most widely used single volume encyclopedia of chemicals, drugs, and biological products. At less than

£30.00 for a well made book of 8 cm thickness providing information on more than 10 000 substances it is a real bargain. "Merck" is also available on CD-ROM although the hard-copy still offers a unique opportunity to those who have not completely adapted to the computer age for browsing from compound to compound.

Each substance is treated by a short monograph providing the essential data. There seem to be more structural formulae in this edition than in earlier ones. The range of substances covered is awesome as is the detail packed into each monograph.

Has this book any drawbacks? Inevitably one would like more toxicological information. Providing this would mean either a second volume (this should be resisted) or a more selective coverage. Given that the book cannot expand indefinitely I think the editors should consider moving to dividing the compounds into those needing better toxicological data and those for which some shortening of the monographs could be acceptable. This sounds like nit picking and to some extent it is. *The Merck Index* is an indispensable book and its editor and publishers should be congratulated.

R L MAYNARD