BOOK REVIEW

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Chemical incident management: local authority environmental health practitioners. Edited by R FAIRMAN, V MURRAY, A KIRKWOOD, P SAUNDERS. (Pp 153; £40.00.) 2001. London: The Stationery Office. ISBN 0 11 322 1215

This is the fourth volume in the chemical incident management series. Like its predecessors it is a slim, well produced paperback that provides a wealth of information on how to plan for (and thus avoid), manage, and recover from a chemical incident. The style is terse and much use is made of lists and diagrams to show desirable organisational structures and decision pathways.

Division into prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery takes the reader through the process, and a complicated process it is. The book requires a good deal of local authorities or, rather, it points out that a great deal is required from them. For an enthusiast this will be familiar territory and the guidance provided here will be a useful aide memoire. For the more average environmental health practitioner (or public health doctor) a sense of being overwhelmed by the detail may occur. One could imagine reading this book and wondering where the funding will come from to put all the excellent advice into practice. This, however, is a negative and dated approach and in the present age of high

expectations and of litigation only a halfwit would ignore the advice provided.

One of the strengths of this book is the 50 or so pages of appendices listing contact points, detailing sampling protocols, and providing specimen forms for site visits and information on how to do risk assessment. It would be sensible for the practitioner to extract key lists and embed them in a laptop computer or even a notebook.

Are there any weaknesses? Very few indeed that I could see. I was left with a feeling that if all this advice were to be followed, an incident would be managed very well. But—what should you do if you are not as prepared as you should be? Perhaps the authors should add a few pages headed “And if you are not well prepared: the coping strategy” to the next edition. I concluded a review of an earlier volume in this series with the advice “read it now, before you need to”. This advice applies to this volume too: every environmental health practitioner should have a copy.

R L MAYNARD

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