

Book Review

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Laboratory health and safety dictionary

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There is an increasing awareness of the desirability of proper management of health and safety in the chemical laboratory and many laboratory workers now have health and safety management duties. New legislation has spawned an ever-increasing mountain of paper, much of it covered with obscure jargon and acronyms. A dictionary that endeavours to clarify this is therefore to be welcomed. Gottschall and Walters have trawled through the considerable volume of US health and safety documentation, mainly concerning chemical laboratories, with the intention of making it comprehensible to a broad spectrum of readers, including those with health and safety responsibilities who are not chemists, firefighters and the general public. In addition to the dictionary of terms, there are three appendices dealing with acronyms and abbreviations, brief biographies and a list of possibly useful addresses.

The dictionary of terms covers an extraordinary range; there is no doubt that the compilers have made a very thorough effort to include as many terms as possible. It is apparent from the word list that many documents use needlessly

obscure terms; this is not a criticism of the dictionary, but of the people who churn out the documentation. Of course, there is a whole spectrum of terms, so that the great difficulty is knowing where to draw the line, particularly if the book is to be of use to the lay user, and a small number of the entries are ordinary, everyday words. The result is that some of the definitions are trivial in the extreme, for example *antimildew agent*, which is rendered as *a compound used to prevent mildew* (*mildew* is, of course, not defined, but *agent* and *compound* are). The authors are clearly aware of this problem and have thrown in the occasional whimsical definition of some of the more obvious words. More seriously, though, some of the definitions are not entirely accurate. For example, *sand* is defined as ... *particles of silicon dioxide* Though it is true that there are some sand deposits that conform to this definition, there are many other minerals that can appear in sand. This is perhaps a consequence of the highly commendable desire to keep the dictionary to a manageable size, with definitions that are both short and simple.

Appendix A is a list of abbreviations and acronyms. Although these are already defined in the main dictionary it is useful to have a separate list, making it much faster to find a particular term. Rather less useful is Appendix B, which lists brief details of scientists whose work has had an effect on chemical health and safety issues, but their contributions to

health and safety are not immediately apparent from the details given. As with Appendix A, the entries are already in the main dictionary. This is also true of Appendix C, a list of the names and addresses of health and safety related organizations. Unfortunately, apart from a few big international ones such as WHO, IATA, IAEA, etc., only US organizations are included. Some non-US national organizations would be useful if the book is to achieve world-wide readership.

On the whole, I find that the great majority of the dictionary section is extremely useful. Being a chemist, I value the terms relating to biology and medicine, and I am sure that others will appreciate the chemical terms. Many of the definitions are models of clarity. This simplicity of definition, although occasionally leading to minor inaccuracies, certainly makes the book accessible to a broad spectrum of potential users, and, in general, I believe that the authors have achieved their goal. At present the book is a worthwhile addition to any health and safety collection and, I am sure, will grow in future editions.

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