

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Handbook of Chemical and Biological Warfare Agents*

REFERENCE: Ellison DH. Handbook of chemical and biological warfare agents. CRC Press LLC, Boca Raton, FL, 2000, 507 pp.

Chemical and biological warfare (CBW) agents pose a serious threat because of the physiological harm they may cause; the relative ease with which they can be deployed; the diverse types and sources of CBW agents which exist; and the difficulty of identifying and classifying the agent (a factor aggravated by the large number of different agents that exist). This last point is particularly important when the CBW agent is encountered by a public safety or emergency services official who may be suspicious of a substance, but lacks the technical training to identify and safely handle the agent. To deal with these eventualities, this book is an invaluable resource which should be in the office of every emergency management official because of the potential of encountering these substances.

The book starts with an extraordinarily comprehensive index of CBW agents by name, by the agent's index number, and the classification index number used in the book as well as by the North American Emergency Response Guidebook (NAERG) guides. This index (which even includes agents with Russian spelling) is a

quick and effective method for seeking information on the various agents. Consistent formats are used for each agent in the handbook's description of the agent's identification, determination of effects, first aid, the agent's properties, and additional analytic and response information. This consistency permits rapid access to necessary information in a logical, intuitive manner. While not written for the layman, the handbook nonetheless contains information which is useful for initial assessment, protection, and treatment in a CBW incident.

According to the author, the details contained in the book represent the best information currently available in sources accessible to the public. As such, while the book is comprehensive, the probability remains that classified CBW agents exist that are not documented in this text. Despite this fact, terrorist groups, both foreign and domestic, are most likely to use an agent that is generally known. All information contained in each Class index of the text is a compilation of information gathered from numerous sources and arranged in a format specifically designed for use in the handbook.

Also included in the book are diverse forms of supplemental information such as a summary of U.S. military chemical munitions markings and a comprehensive glossary of terms. As the title states, this is a handbook. It is not a work that one would likely sit down and read cover to cover. Rather, it is a resource for training and for managing a CBW incident. This handbook fills those roles very effectively.

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