

## Book reviews

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*Building 6, The Tragedy at Bridesburg* by Willard S. Randall and Stephen D. Solomon, Little, Brown and Co., Boston and Toronto, 1977, 317 pages, \$ 9.95.

Muckraking, the process by which a journalist discredits individuals, or organisations, has become a widely-accepted approach to life in the United States, and often draws a large following. It is easy to criticise; not all individuals or organisations (even journalists) are so super human that they can avoid mistakes. When that criticism becomes a violent denunciation of a company, and human life is the question, it becomes difficult to know how to interpret and understand certain aspects of a study.

Building 6, the scene of the book, is a production building inside a major chemical production complex in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, area. Beginning early in the 1950's, the building produced chloromethylether and its by-product bis-chloromethylether. Chloromethylether, in the presence of hydrogen ion and hydroxyl ion with traces of water, disproportionates to aldehydes and methylal, which recombine to form Bis-CME. It is now recognised that Bis-CME is a very potent carcinogen (it was on the first list of regulated carcinogens by O.S.H.A. in the U.S.). The book relates to the exposure of personnel to this material, and to the steps which the company took to improve the situation and protect its employees. How many have been exposed, and how many died is not clear; one newspaper article referred to "54 who died".

This book is not the last word, but certainly an interesting example of a grim study. When the company involved was asked to comment on the book, we learned that they have issued no statement or press release regarding this publication. After reviewing the text, they concluded such action would serve no useful purpose. Until the whole story is seen in the proper scientific (not emotional) perspective, we can only hope that misunderstandings and knowledge gaps will not occur in the future (although we are realistic enough to fear they occasionally will).

H.H. FAWCETT

*Radioactive Waste Disposal — Low & High Level* edited by William R.

Gilmore, Noyes Data Corporation, Park Ridge, NJ, 1977, 363 pages, \$ 39.

This book provides a reasonably comprehensive review of U.S. work directed towards solving the problems posed by the accumulation of wastes from the nuclear fuel cycle. It predates the 'Carter edict' and therefore considers almost exclusively the disposal of reprocessing wastes and says little concerning disposal of unprocessed fuel. This is unfortunate, since it would have been