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Book Reviews

Hazardous Materials Spills Handbook, by G.F. Bennett, F.S. Feates and I. Wilder (Eds.), McGraw-Hill, New York, 1982, ISBN 0-07-004680-8, 704 pages, indexed, $49.50, £37.95.

Handbooks, by definition, consist of self-contained entries which are so written that the user may rapidly find the required information within a short article without the need for back-referencing or prolonged study. This handbook, largely speaking, fulfils these criteria and presents a comprehensive account of current knowledge, drawing mainly on North American and U.K. experience.

Chapters are concise and consist of clearly headed sub-sections, often not more than a paragraph in length, enabling rapid scanning and selective reading of desired items. As a handbook it does not attempt to be exhaustive in its detail, but rather definitive in its coverage of the subject. Thus, all the pertinent aspects of hazardous material spills are included, from national and international legislation, prevention measures and risk assessment through response plans and information systems; environmental and economic impacts; protective clothing; spill clean-up and ultimate disposal. Particular attention is given in Chapters 10 and 11 to the special hazards arising from spillages of volatile materials. Also commendable is the account of the impact of spillages on municipal facilities and surface waters — of crucial importance to water authority and local government officers, but often omitted in earlier works.

The emphasis throughout appears to be on defining the scope of each subject and summarising its main features, leaving detailed study to be pursued via the comprehensive reference list supporting most of the chapters. Thus the *Handbook* also acts as a guide to the literature and, incidentally, serves the much needed function of a hazardous materials spills bibliography. This is particularly important in connection with some topics where the view expressed on a contentious issue (e.g. conditions leading to dense gas cloud formation) is the author's own, rather than a balanced account of all the aspects. This affects relatively few of the topics dealt with, and it should be clear to the reader where further critical reading is needed.

The obscure nature of some of the references illustrates the inaccessibility of much of the literature. In apparent recognition of this, numerous tables and charts are included, many derived from such specialised documents, often in a full-page layout; they are of immense benefit to the user in search of specific information or data in a summarised format.

Mercifully the editors have spared us yet another "response manual", of which 17 already exist! (See them listed in Chapter 7, Part 2.) Rather the value of this book lies in its authoritative and definitive coverage of the whole problem, in a ready-reference style designed to establish it as the

first item consulted when pursuing a line of enquiry in this field. As a research tool it is unique and fills a major deficiency in the hazardous materials literature. It also provides a satisfactory, if somewhat overwhelming, introduction to the subject. Indeed, the size of the book and its impressive list of over 50 contributors are the result of the first ever attempt to treat the many aspects of hazardous materials in one volume, and these statistics are surely indicative of the magnitude and inter-disciplinary nature of the subject.

J.E. HOOKHAM and R.F. GRIFFITHS

Acceptable Risk, by B. Fischhoff, S. Lichtenstein, P. Slovic, S. Derby and R. Keeney, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, ISBN 0-521-24164-2, 185 pages incl. index, £15.00.

The authors of this highly readable book are well known for their work in the social aspects of risk and risk management. Their approach reflects the multidisciplinary (primarily social science) expertise of the group; it is a worthy successor to earlier explorations in this area of risk, which is concerned with management and social factors, and with how the technological aspects interact with these facets.

The authors examine first the knotty problem of why acceptable risk questions are so hard to resolve, and give examples of approaches that have been adopted. There is much here that will give food for thought for the technologist concerned with risks of all kinds. The treatment is intelligent, provoking and very readable to the non-social scientist (such as the present reviewer). A commendable feature of the book is the inclusion of substantial concluding chapters with recommendations for research and for current practice in risk management. All in all, a worthwhile book and good value at the price.

R.F. GRIFFITHS

High Risk Safety Technology, by A.E. Green (Ed.), Wiley, Chichester, 1982, ISBN 0-471-10153-2, 654 pages incl. index, £25.00.

This book consists of a compilation of contributions from 44 authors, the material being organised in four parts. The Library of Congress and the British Library publication data list the subject matter as Industrial Safety — Addresses, Essays, Lectures. This is a fair description that reflects its nature better than the statement on the jacket that "The material has been struc-