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Book Review/Recension

Child Health and the Environment

Donald T. Wigle, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; 396 pages, $55.00 US (hardcover), ISBN: 0-19-513559-8

Child Health and the Environment is a valuable book to raise awareness of threats to fetal, infant, and child health from anthropogenic factors in the environment. The first three chapters present an overview of environmental threats, epidemiology, and risk assessment. The remaining chapters are organized according to specific environmental threats suspected or known to influence reproductive, developmental, neurobehavioural, and cancer outcomes. The author includes metals, PCBs, pesticides, radiation, and air and water quality. Chapter 8 focusses specifically on hormonally active agents. For each environmental threat, the author presents evidence of risk of exposure, health effects, and risk management issues.

The book provides a number of good tables, references and resources related to health and toxic chemicals, which will make it a valuable resource guide. The specific focus on hormonally active agents is especially valuable given the emergence of health effects related to these toxic chemicals. Considerable evidence presented in the book is extrapolated from studies of adults which points out the need for further investigations into environmental threats to child health. Additional chapter(s) on fetal and childhood biology would provide the novice reader with the basics of the development of the major organ systems and their vulnerability to environmental threats. The book would also have benefitted from development of a child-focussed risk assessment process rather than presentation of the USEPA risk assessment paradigm.

The book introduces readers to the precautionary principle, and the health consequences that have resulted from the failure to apply this principle in the past. However, the book does not develop the precautionary principle specifically in relation to child health and the environment, and its application in risk management. This will limit the use of the book for guiding public health policy in the area of child health.

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