Book Review

Environmental Policy and Public Health

Barry L. Johnson. Boca Raton (FL): CRC Press, 2006. Hardcover; 496 pages; \$79.95

Dr. Barry Johnson, now at the Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University, was for many years an administrator of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and Director of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. Johnson's monograph is comprehensive and well organized. The Table of Contents spans nine pages, comprising a detailed numerical outline of the book. The first three chapters present the fundamentals and history of public health and environmental philosophy, history, and current U.S. infrastructure. The next five chapters are devoted to the rationale, political history, provisions, and public health implications of more than 21 U.S. statutes. The final three chapters focus on international programs, environmental justice, and risk assessment.

Each chapter closes with a summary and policy question exercises, as well as footnotes and references. Bulleted lists and some tables and figures are interspersed. There's an excellent glossary with its own references. The abbreviations list includes those mentioned repeatedly, but not all those that appear in specific chapters. There are virtually no mathematical or chemical formulae.

The book summarizes the most important national and international documents underlying U.S. environmental health policy and recounts how governmental public health and environmental agencies developed their structures, missions, and responsibilities. There are extensive case examples.

The author also specifies topics that were beyond the scope of this volume, including prevention of injuries and indoor air issues, such as environmental tobacco smoke. However, the book provides a framework for addressing some aspects of those issues and other issues he doesn't discuss, such as disinfection byproducts. This volume will undoubtedly be useful for approaching future surprises as well.

For Johnson, public health protection is always the primary goal, but he describes practical realities for long-term accomplishment of prevention in this country. His insightful text presents multiple views on controversies inherent in environmental health policy. Often, he includes quotes from salient documents or representatives of specific arguments; for example,

regarding cap and trade policies. He also makes his own views known on practical and philosophical issues and expresses opinions about the wisdom and success of various individuals, decisions, and actions within the last 30 years. As examples, Dr. Johnson criticizes recent New Source Review exemptions under the Clean Air Act and comments specifically on past controversies and the means by which they were resolved, such as the "brouhaha" on the drinking water standards for arsenic.

Major cross-cutting topics, such as balancing risks, costs, and benefits, and the dichotomy of authority between environmental and health agencies, are considered throughout the volume. Some emerging issues are discussed; climate change is treated in the context of United Nations programs.

For a field as vast and complex as this, some topics necessarily must be given short shrift. In this volume, risk communication receives merely a brief mention. Cancer issues and policies are discussed only in terms of the formation and activities of the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

CRC's page design uses small text size and small margins. Minor quibbles of this reviewer with some editorial decisions include the following: Occasional statements relating to cultural anthropology or political history are not referenced, and some readers might disagree with the author on the personalities and motivations of specific political and administrative figures. There are also places where bulleted lists and contrasting points would be easier to grasp than the paragraph format of those lists. Several boxed text highlights don't seem to merit the emphasis and may have been placed mainly to break up the page of text. A few concepts are mentioned without definition (e.g., "threshold" in risk assessment). Additionally, many small copy editing errors should be corrected in a future edition or printing, but I saw none that obscured the author's meaning.

In sum, this volume would be a valuable undergraduate or graduate textbook. It can also be a fine resource for environmental health policy practitioners, including those working within or in conjunction with all levels and branches of government.

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