

## Book Review

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**The Health Effects of Chrysotile Asbestos: Contribution of Science to Risk-Management Decisions. R. P. Nolan, A. M. Langer, M. Ross, F. J. Wicks, and R. F. Martin, Editors; 312 pages; The Canadian Mineralogist Special Publication 5 (December 2001); \$38.**

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This title contains a collection of papers that summarize the state of knowledge about chrysotile- and amphibole-group asbestos minerals like tremolite, riebeckite, and grunerite from historical and modern perspectives. Topics include analysis of historical and modern controlled exposures, incidence of cancer, epidemiology, mineralogy, and metamorphic petrology, and statistical assessment of risks.

In September 1997, the Mineralogical Association of Canada (MAC) sponsored the international workshop "Health Effects of Chrysotile Asbestos" in Montreal. Since 1955, MAC's mission has been to promote and advance the knowledge of mineralogy and the related disciplines of crystallography, petrology, geochemistry, and economic geology. (For further information, please visit the association's Web site: <http://www.mineralogicalassociation.ca/aboutmac.html>.) The workshop led to a commitment to publish the refereed contributions that comprise this book.

As a general rule, proceedings of conferences, workshops, seminars, and the like do not make for easy reading because they are intended to appeal to particular interests within particular interests (i.e., a highly specialized target audience including those who attended the workshop or those who wanted to attend but could not). It is clear, however, that the editors have made a good effort in organizing the papers and enforcing a degree of uniformity in the writing, making it seem more like a systematic discussion of the state of knowledge concerning the health effects of chrysotile asbestos than the proceedings of a conference.

The editors offer this text as a scientific perspective on the historical era of high exposures to mixed types of asbestos fibers, as well as an exploration of the modern era of controlled uses of chrysotile asbestos in limited products, from which decisions will be made concerning future uses. To facilitate this, the text has been divided into the following five parts:

1. Exposure to Amphibole-Asbestos and Mixed Fibers
2. Exposure to Commercial Chrysotile—Mineralogy, Modern Products, and Exposures
3. Mechanisms of Mesothelioma and Lung Cancer
4. Exposure to Commercial Chrysotile—Historical Perspectives of the Health Effects

5. Exposure to Commercial Chrysotile—Modern Perspectives of the Health Effects

There is certainly enough controversy and political fallout over the lack of knowledge (or suppressed knowledge in a few too many cases) concerning the health effects of asbestos, that whatever can be done to bring the best and most currently available scientific knowledge to bear on the task of determining and managing risk must be done.

The town of Libby, Montana, knows these issues all too well, and is struggling to understand (after hundreds of people have either died or been diagnosed with fatal diseases after being exposed to tremolite asbestos from a vermiculite mine) why the risk of asbestos exposure was not made known to them. For further information, see the special report "A Town Left to Die," published by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*: <http://www.seattlep-i.com> (Special Report: Uncivil).

*The Health Effects of Chrysotile Asbestos* is a welcome addition to the existing body of knowledge to help us understand and manage risk of exposure to mineral fibers. Unfortunately, this will not help in formulating policies or informing the unsuspecting populace of hazards where they live. The known must somehow be combined with responsible and ethical *behavior* of our industries and governments to protect families of the world from such preventable diseases. It is not enough to *know*.