

EHP: History and Objectives

BY George W. Lucier* and Gary E.R. Hook*

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVES was first published as an experimental journal in April 1972. Prior to that time, the goals of EHP were outlined by Dr. David P. Rall, Director of NIEHS, in his request for authorization to experiment with production of a journal: "I believe that there is a need for the publication of research findings and commentaries on topics in environmental health. The gaps which might be filled by such a publication are in four categories: providing a forum for early publication of findings which might have broad impact due to the ubiquity of so many constituents of the human environment; providing a forum for concentrated exploration of the context and perspective of basic research on environmental constituents; providing a focus which indisputably covers those aspects of basic environmental research which have human health implications; and providing a medium for publication and exchange of adequately documented negative findings on these topics."

NIEHS published a total of seven experimental issues between 1972 and 1974, the last being distributed in May 1974. The tables of contents for these seven issues are presented in the appendix. Five of these issues comprised conference proceedings and the other two contained review-perspective articles.

The Office of Management and Budget has recently approved our request that EHP be

*Co-managing editors, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVES, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, National Institutes of Health, P.O. Box 12233, Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709.

published on a permanent basis. This stipulates that EHP, for the most part, will be available only on a subscription basis. For this reason we think that it will be helpful to our readers to explain the organization and goals of our journal in this, the first volume printed as a permanent publication.

The function of the NIEHS is to conduct and support basic biomedical research on the effects of various environmental agents and conditions adverse to human health and to inform the federal and scientific community of possible health hazards that are associated with particular environmental agents. This information is utilized by regulatory agencies to define potential and actual health hazards and to propound safe and reasonable regulatory controls pertaining to their continued use. The NIEHS requires some means of making information and status reports quickly available to the federal and scientific community to fulfill its mission. A journal such as ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVES satisfies this need by providing a vehicle for the rapid publication and dissemination of conference and workshop proceedings, perspective statements on selected problem areas, and toxicologic information summaries.

Conference and workshops are the most effective means of summarizing current scientific information with regard to specified problem areas. Scientists from all areas, federal, academic, and private industry, meet to present data and assess the current status of the toxicity of selected environmental chemicals. These conferences have been extremely valuable to

date. They have allowed for the careful evaluation of the toxic risks associated with several environmental agents, and have provided a clear definition of research areas which need to be further studied. The NIEHS has sponsored conferences to assess the toxic status of the polychlorinated biphenyls, the phthalate acid esters, the chlorinated dibenzodioxins, and the lead compounds, each of which are important classes of chemicals widely dispersed in the environment. In addition, a workshop on mutagenic test procedures was published recently, and this constitutes a valuable contribution for the assessment of the validity of mutagenic test systems and how these tests can be extrapolated to human health problems. Conference proceedings on mobile air emissions, asbestos, vinyl chlorides and target organ toxicity will be published in subsequent issues of EHP. Conferences are designed to be comprehensive. They have included aspects of industrial use, analytical methodology, distribution within the environment, biotransformation, pharmacokinetics, mammalian toxicology and pathology, effects on aquatic ecosystems, and needs for future research. Proceedings are published within 4 to 6 months after the conference. This facilitates rapid dissemination of scientific information on timely environmental issues in complete comprehensive form to regulatory agencies and other interested parties.

Overviews of areas of environmental health concern are provided by the publication of perspectives. These articles are attempts to review the existing literature carefully with regard to a specific problem or agent and to summarize this information in much the same manner accomplished by the conferences. Perspective articles obviously are not so extensive or detailed as the conference proceedings. Examples of some overviews published in ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVES are papers on noise pollution, health effects of microwave radiation, methods of investigating environmental health problems,

toxication-detoxication systems, health effects of cadmium, mercury and other heavy metals, and of course the articles presented in this volume of EHP. Perspective articles are often solicited by the Editorial Board and submission of voluntary contributions are freely encouraged so that the wide scope of this periodical can be maintained. Regardless of the source, manuscripts are reviewed by the Editorial Board and selected referees to insure a high quality of scientific presentation. The need for an outlet for definitive reviews of particular toxicological problems was expressed by the Toxicology Information Program of the National Library of Medicine which is preparing a number of releases for this publication. The Toxicology Information Program also prepares literature searches on selected environmental health areas designed to supplement conference proceedings. The NIEHS retains the right to review this material for its scientific content, and makes suggestions concerning chemicals or areas for the Toxicology Information Program to consider in the future. Guest editorials on selected areas of health research are also published.

To minimize overlap and competition with existing journals, considerable weight in the editorial selection of articles is being accorded the requirement that the contribution provides a perspective of a given problem. Such perspectives would include: evidence for and against a particular set of contaminants posing a health problem; for example by showing that the exact chemical configuration can determine toxicity thus providing guidance for both production and control; or indicating inadequacies in the current technology of testing or evaluating the hazardous nature of an agent. The flexible format permits the publication to deal on one occasion with a topical conference, on another with a definitive review of a problem, and on still another with critical advances of scientific knowledge. We hope that you will communicate your ideas to us on how we can better fulfill the objectives of EHP.