



Geology and Health: Closing the Gap

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Geology and Health is an integration of papers from geo-bio-chemical scientists on health issues of concern to humankind worldwide, demonstrating how the health and well-being of populations now and in the future can benefit through coordinated scientific efforts. International examples on dusts, coal, arsenic, fluorine, lead, mercury, and water borne chemicals, that lead to health effects are documented and explored. They were selected to illustrate how hazards and potential hazards may be from natural materials and processes and how anthropomorphic changes may have contributed to disease and debilitation instead of solutions. Introductory essays by the editors highlight some of the progress toward scientific integration that could be applied to other geographic sites and research efforts. A global purview and integration of earth and health sciences expertise could benefit the future of populations from many countries. Effective solutions to combat present and future hazards will arise when the full scope of human interactions with the total environment is appreciated by the wide range of people in positions to make important and probably expensive decisions. A case to illustrate the point of necessary crossover between Geology and Health was the drilling of shallow tube wells in Bangladesh to provide non-contaminated ground water. This "good" solution unfortunately mobilized arsenic from rocks into the aquifer and created an unforeseen or 'silent' hazard: arsenic. Geologists produce maps of earth materials and are concerned with natural processes in the environment with long time-frame horizons. The health effects encountered through changing the water source might have been avoided if the hydrological characteristics of the Bangladesh delta had been known and any chemical hazards had been investigated and documented. A recurrence of this type of oversight should be avoidable when responsible parties, often government officials, appreciate the necessity of such integrated efforts. The book extols the virtues of cooperation between the earth, life and health sciences, as the most practical approach to better public health worldwide.

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