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Environmental Poisons in Our Food

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Peer reviewed

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Millichap, M. Gordon. *Environmental Poisons in Our Food*.  
Chicago: PNB Publishers, 1993. 271pp. US\$29.95 hardbound,  
US\$14.95 ISBN: 0-9629115-7-7.

Despite the sensationalist title, the author's credentials are impressive: Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics and Neurology at Northwestern University Medical School and former consultant in Pediatric Neurology, Mayo Clinic. Certainly he is better qualified than the authors of the slew of goblins'll- getcha-if-ya-don't-watch-out food scare books that came out in the early 1970's. Moreover, individual sentences in this book are generally accurate and unexceptionable. It's the tendency to link one fact to another with the implication of causality that should make the reader wary.

The publisher's flyer touts the book as "a comprehensive compendium of environmental food and water toxicology, nutritionally induced diseases, with emphasis on neurological and other complications epidemiology, diagnosis, prevention and treatment." That's a lot for 271 pages; comprehensive coverage of a single nutritionally-induced disease would run to multiple volumes.

So what is *Environmental Poisons in Our Food*? It is more than a polemic; Millichap is knowledgeable and has certainly had the chance to observe the medical effects of environmental exposure to toxic substances. Unfortunately, his book is less than evenhanded and scientifically balanced; there are certainly dangers to ingesting lead or DDT, but the reader who took all these warnings to heart would end up eating nothing. Many inferences are set up by proximity of one statement to another, when there is no logical progression.

Comparing Millichap's section on mercury poisoning with the chapter in Horace Graham's 1980 *Safety of Foods* is a revealing exercise. It isn't that they are wildly contradictory; it's just that the Graham chapter is so much more complete, rational, balanced and well-documented that *Environmental Poisons in Our Food* comparison looks like the National Inquirer.

Not recommended.