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Water Quality and Availability: a Reference Handbook

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Miller, E. Willard and Ruby M. Miller. *Water Quality and Availability: a Reference Handbook*. Contemporary World Issues. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1992. 430pp. US\$39.50 hardbound  
ISBN: 0-87436-647-X. Printed on acid-free paper.

We in the western world consider clean, abundant water to be our birthright. Yet despite the great engineering feats of the past century that have given us efficient water distribution and wastewater treatment systems, problems persist. Wastewater treatment continues to be virtually nonexistent in some communities, even in North America, and concerns about chemicals in drinking water are being voiced loudly in the media. As well, although it is said that there is plenty of water to go around, it is true that some areas do not have enough water and others have too much.

*Water Quality and Quantity* addresses the many water related issues facing us today. This is an ambitious book, possibly intended for college students and others who need an overview of these issues. It consists of an essay, some statistics, a chronology of events, a listing of relevant American legislation, a directory of national and international organizations and government agencies and a large bibliography. Almost every conceivable topic is covered in rapid succession from agriculture to waste management, including riparian rights, arsenic speciation and sewage utilization.

Given the wide scope of this book it is understandable that depth has been sacrificed for breadth. As a result, difficult problems such as landfill design that are elsewhere the subject of full length text books are here given no more than a sentence or two. This approach can be risky in scientific publications. When insufficient information is presented generalizations that are not validated by science may creep in. This quotation is a case in point:

"Aluminum is the fourth most common element in the Earth's crust, and is found in water everywhere. There is evidence that aluminum causes damage to the nervous system in humans and possible brain disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease." (p. 33)

Are the authors suggesting that ambient aluminum causes Alzheimer's disease? If so, they would have a hard time finding the scientific evidence to back up their claim. Such assertions, given without adequate proof, will alienate scientists and, worse, could mislead lay people.

Librarians looking for a scientifically sound and well written publication that deals with these same issues would do well to consider *A National Water Agenda for the 21st Century*, available from the Water Environment Federation. The bonus with this report is that not only does it present real problems in a thoughtful manner but it offers solutions. Similarly there are many excellent bibliographies, including the Geraghty Miller Ground Water Bibliography. A good directory is *Directory of Environmental Information Sources* published by Government Institutes, Inc.

Is *Water Quality and Quantity* worth purchasing? Its cover tells us it is part of an award winning series. The index is useful. The bibliography is a pleasure to behold. There is even a glossary. However, in these days of shrinking budgets, this book is not a priority.