Achieving Environmental Goals


An Environmental Performance Review (EPR) can be "loosely defined as an authoritative evaluation of state policy conducted by an external party," explains the editor of these collected articles. The purpose of an EPR is to improve the environmental behavior of states, or to encourage greater compliance with international environmental agreements, or to improve the quality and availability of environmental information and monitoring. In short, the EPR is a sort of environmental report card intended to create strong economic and political incentives for nations to improve their environmental behavior.

The 13 articles, written mostly by European biological or physical scientists, economists, and policy specialists associated with universities, international research organizations, or policy institutes, are organized into six sections that attempt to address major problems involved in creating and implementing an EPR: "Concept and Design," "Implementation Failure," "Monitoring and Evaluation," "Imperfections on Scientific Advice," "Involving the Public," and "Practice and Prospects." It would be difficult to argue against the desirability of EPRs. The growing realization that most major environmental problems require regional or international management and that few effective environmental agreements currently exist is evidence enough. The well-written and edited articles in this book explore many important aspects of an EPR and offer what amounts to a design specification for it. The ideas should stimulate thought and debate about the utility of EPRs. Unfortunately, the materials in this book never come to terms with the most refractory problems involved in institutionalizing EPRs. In effect, this is a book—to rephrase the title—about "concept" rather than "practice."

The book's greatest deficiency is that no significant EPRs currently exist (as the editor acknowledges) and the authors never directly, clearly confront the political or economic problems involved in creating such EPRs. Rather, the book seems to proceed on the premise that EPRs shall somehow appear and we should understand how to go about the business of conducting them. Other obvious, practical problems are neglected. The Section on "Monitoring and Evaluation," for instance, never acknowledges the grave deficiencies in environmental monitoring and data quality throughout European states, nor explores the implications for EPRs. Additionally, little attention is invested in examining the political or constructive discussion of strategies useful to the scientific/technical community in promoting EPRs would also have been helpful.—W.A. ROSENBaUM, Department of Political Science, 3324 Turlington Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

Biogeochemistry of Trace Metals


This book contains 16 chapters, derived largely from the plenary sessions of the International Conference on Metals in Soils, Waters, Plants and Animals held in Orlando, FL, in 1990. It is exemplary among conference proceedings. The chapters are written carefully and clearly, they are complementary, and there is little redundancy. Together, they offer a comprehensive discussion of the problems associated with metal contamination in the terrestrial environment. Some rather novel ideas are included. Most chapters are well-researched, solid reviews. Most useful, in my view, is the extensive, recent (to 1990), and carefully selected references: more than 1000 papers are cited. Each chapter has a good abstract, and these will be quite helpful as guidance for selective readers.

Chapter 1 by Davies is an overview of trace element research that provides a historical perspective, and supplies many of the original references for concepts that are now generally accepted. Although Davies comments in some detail on some