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Chemicals in the international trade: information and control

Edited by

S. Caroli, F. Chiodo and A. Menditto

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Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras

Dedication

A few months after the conclusion of the workshop that inspired the publication of this special issue of *Annali*, we were all shocked by the sad news about the unexpected, untimely demise during an ascent in the Alps of Dr Michel Gilbert, one of the protagonists of that event. Still unwilling to acknowledge that he is no more among us, friends and colleagues will sincerely miss his calm, yet stimulating presence that rendered it a genuine pleasure to collaborate with him. My first recollections of his open-minded and wholehearted attitude towards life and people date back to the late seventies, when during a meeting in Geneva, a few hours after our first encounter, I was admitted to his house, where in a relaxed mood I enjoyed the company of his family. In the following years other opportunities of this kind frequently occurred, always bestowing on me a vivid impression of warmth and tranquillity. In the same way his professional capabilities and infectious enthusiasm had the merit of constantly making lighter everybody's workload. To Dr Gilbert, unforgettable as he is, to his family and all those who dearly loved him this issue of *Annali*, the achievement of which was largely due to his substantial support and encouragement, is in all sincerity dedicated.

Sergio Caroli

Preface

The benefits and drawbacks consequent to the widespread use of chemicals are inextricably interwoven. According to recent estimates more than 8 million substances are presently known, 70,000 of which are in common use as industrial compounds, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, food additives, cosmetics and the like. The deleterious consequences deriving from their exploitation and abuse pose tremendous challenges to the scientific community as well as to regulatory bodies for the protection of human health and the environment. In recent years awareness and evidence of the enormity of the ensuing problems has greatly increased. It also became apparent that the only chance to minimize the adverse impact of chemicals, without renouncing to their expected advantages, called for joint international action. A pivotal role from this standpoint is played by the availability of valid information on the pros and cons of chemical substances. This in turn results from the synergic combination of highly harmonized approaches for achieving reliable and comparable experimental data; along with the prompt accessibility to the data banks and databases containing the factual data. To evaluate the progress made in the achievement of such goals, in November 1993 an international workshop (*) was held at the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, with the participation of the major international organizations involved in chemicals management and control, namely OECD, EU, FAO and UNEP. The lively debate that took place over the three days of this event fully reflected the various, to some extent unresolved, facets of the topics within the scope of the meeting.

The exchange of views had on that occasion fostered the design of this special issue of the *Annali*, aimed at providing the interested reader with a thorough and updated survey of the state-of-the-art strategies and future development for the judicious use of chemical substances.

The Editors

Sergio Caroli (a), Ferdinando Chiodo (b)
and Antonio Menditto (b)

(a) *Laboratorio di Tossicologia Applicata*; (b) *Laboratorio di Biochimica Clinica*,
Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

(*) Workshop on "Chemicals in the international trade: information and control", Rome, November 10-12, 1993.