



Environmental Public Health Policy for Asbestos in Schools: Unintended Consequences

Jacqueline Karn Corn

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On January 3, 1977, Howell Township, New Jersey closed its schools while scientists tested for dangerous levels of asbestos. After reports of unexplained ailments in some children, the parents of 4,500 elementary school children had threatened to boycott classes until the Board of Education removed asbestos-containing materials. Similar cases occurred across the country. In February, 1977, the New York Times reported that the child whose illness had been attributed to asbestos actually had mononucleosis.

Was the reaction of parents and officials unwarranted? Did scientific evidence exist indicating that asbestos in schools caused children to become ill? Was all the relevant information - including the impact of their decisions on public policy in the future - considered? *Environmental Public Health Policy for Asbestos in Schools* addresses these questions by focusing on the development, institutionalization, and consequences of federal environmental policy for asbestos in schools.

This unique and timely book explores the history of asbestos in schools and buildings and how this issue shaped the development of public health policy. Insight into past policy, including how, why, and who caused action to be taken, will enlighten and guide the scientific and regulatory communities in the future. The story of asbestos is a cautionary tale. Other toxic agents, such as lead, nitrogen dioxide and radon, could follow the same model as asbestos, raising similar questions.

Written in a straightforward style, *Environmental Public Health Policy for Asbestos in Schools* explains technical concepts in language easily understood by non-experts. Understanding the factors and judgments involved in this issue gives insight into how the government - and society - perceives, assesses, and develops public health policy.

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