

# A History of Chemical Compounds

## The 100 Most Important Chemical Compounds: A Reference Guide

Richard L. Myers

Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2007  
Hardcover, 326 pp., \$85.00

Intelligently presented with effective graphics, the author succeeds in his stated intention of presenting the social and economic impact of chemical discoveries on human history. However, the concessions to green fascism on such controversial entries as carbon dioxide, DDT, dichlorodifluoromethane (freon), and even THC (the active ingredient in marijuana), are disappointing.

Not so long ago, chemistry was a required course in American high schools, because of the recognition of the

subject's importance to an industrial society. Today, when we are no longer an industrial but an imperial/importer society, the attempt to teach an understanding of physical economic processes has given way to instruction in rules and procedures—even in our science courses.

The author has brought a thorough grasp of chemistry, as well as considerable knowledge of its history and present applications to bear on the subject. Had he also stuck to truth rather than popular opinion on the controversial areas, he would have produced a less flawed work. Nonetheless, it would probably make a net positive contribution to any school or personal reference library.

—Laurence Hecht

## Enrico Fermi on Film

### "The World of Enrico Fermi" and "People and Particles"

DVD format, 2007

Distributed by the American Association of Physics Teachers, [www.aapt.org](http://www.aapt.org), \$19.99

This DVD, distributed by the American Association of Physics Teachers, was originally created for use in high school classrooms in the 1960s, as part of Project Physics, a Harvard University program involved in curriculum planning. This is the first time the films have been made available to the public.

The Fermi film is very well done, with intelligent commentary and fascinating footage of Enrico Fermi, his wife, and his students (many of them eminent physicists). Unlike many of today's films for students, the music is unobtrusive and the presentation presumes a thinking viewer.

Fermi comes to life in photos and through the comments of his wife and colleagues. You also hear Fermi's own voice explaining a point in a lecture.

The films give a taste of what it was like to be a scientist at a time when there was more enthusiasm for ideas and science, and when a national mission, the Manhattan Project, pushed individuals of all ages to come up with new solutions to technical problems—in a hurry. My only complaint is that this film was not longer!

"People and Particles" is a very different sort of film. It chronicles a Harvard Physics Department team at the Cambridge

Electron Accelerator that designs and builds an electron beam experiment over a two-year period. The objective of the project is to see how electrical charges interact at close distance. The camera follows the people on the team candidly as they talk about the equipment they will need, make a floor plan, build a large spark chamber, write the computer program for analyzing the results, put the equipment in place (including an enormous magnet, which is dubbed the "Green Giant"), talk with a visiting Armenian scientist, and, finally, break out the champagne, after the first shot shows that the experimental design works.

This film is also a slice of history, this time from the late 1960s, and it gives a good sense of scientists at work on a problem to see if the evidence matches the theory. It is telling that in the film notes, physicist James Rutherford mentions that the Accelerator later had to be dismantled for lack of money to run it.

—Marjorie Mazel Hecht



## BOOK NOTES

### Geographic Family Reference Atlas of the World

Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006

Hardcover, 384 pp., with 510 maps and 430 illustrations, \$65.00

National Geographic's *Family Reference Atlas* is lavishly illustrated, as you would expect from a publisher known for its photographs and illustrations.

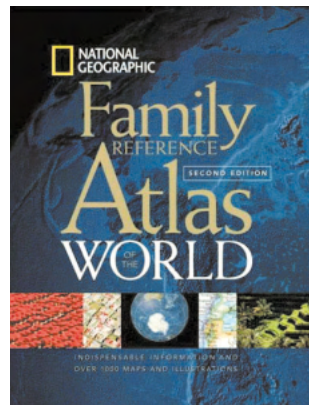
It provides detailed maps—geographical, topological, political, mineral, and agricultural. Like the atlases I remember from elementary school, it has little symbols for the agricultural products that characterize each area. But unlike the atlases of my childhood, it provides maps of political "hotspots," so that you can easily find Abkazia or Chechnya, to name two such hotspots in the news.

And like most "educational" items today, it provides the same conventionally "correct" opinions about global warming, biodiversity, and other such environmental issues in its topical introductions.

There are also some telling omissions and bloopers. In the energy descriptions, for example, there are symbols for other forms of energy—but not for nuclear plants. There is no map of world railroads, or even U.S. railroads, a standard infrastructure item and a crucial measure of economic development. In the blooper department, the Atlas's section on the poles makes mention of the British expedition to Antarctica, but, remarkably says nothing about the monumental U.S. Exploratory Expedition, 1839-1842, headed by John Wilkes and promoted by John Quincy Adams, which got to Antarctica first!

With these caveats in mind, this is a usable atlas.

—Marjorie Mazel Hecht



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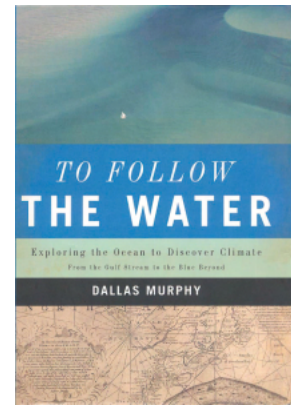
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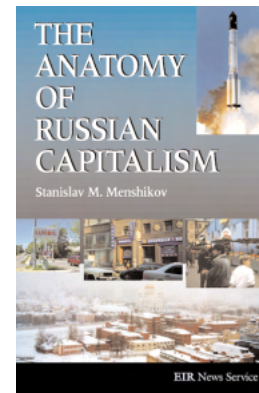
New York: Basic Books, 2007

Hardcover, 278 pp., \$26.00

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