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Peer reviewed

Review: *Technology, Law, and the Working Environment*

By Nicholas A Ashford,. and Charles C. Caldart

Reviewed by Roger R. Hlavek
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Ashford, Nicholas A. and Charles C. Caldart. *Technology, Law, and the Working Environment*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996. 641 pp. US \$39.95 paper ISBN: 1-55963-445-4. Recycled, acid-free paper.

"Laws are like sausages. It is better not to see them being made," stated the late German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Ashford and Caldart, associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, illustrate the diverse ingredients involved in legislation. An analogy of a spider web comes to mind, in which strands are pulled in different directions by parties involved (labor, government, management), trying to maintain the integrity of the whole, yet allowing some autonomous movement along legal, scientific, and economic lines.

The format of *Technology, Law, and the Working Environment* is unique in that it uses three types of text style to integrate the authors' own material, selected readings, and authors' notes. The three entities are interspersed, giving the reader the real sensation of the give and take involved as these dynamic issues go through the iterative process necessary to produce a useful product.

The book has ten chapters. The reader is initially led through the general legislative process and the two major statutes covered in the text (Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA)). The focus then shifts to the workplace to illustrate how economics and labor-management issues blend with the safety, health and environmental regulations, particularly the employee's right to be informed and subsequent avenues of redress.

One specific example of the process is illustrated in a section of Chapter 3, which chronicles the development of the asbestos standard, showing how it was reduced from 12 f/cc in 1971 to its current level of 0.1 f/cc. Other instances of limit development showing the interplay of agencies, workers, and management give the reader an appreciation for the difficulty in developing an acceptable regulation.

The book is intended for people in business, law, and engineering. The reader with experience in these multiple disciplines would derive the optimum benefit. However, the book is thought provoking for all because it repeatedly shows how seemingly simple issues have many valid interpretations.

The index provides the full text of OSHA and TSCA Acts. Environmental issues are not as well covered as might be expected. Perhaps a cursory treatment of water, air, and waste programs would have balanced the focus.

Overall, this is a useful resource for both management and technical people. Professionals involved in negotiation issues (labor, standards, interpretations) should appreciate this text.

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