



Explosives

by Rudolph Meyer, Josef Köhler and Axel Homburg, Wiley-VCH, Weinheim, Germany, 6th completely revised edn, 2007, pp viii + 421, ISBN 978-3-527-31656-4, Price: USD 121.95, EUR 179.00

I come from an era when chemistry was known as the subject of stinks and bangs but alas health and safety regulations have ensured that such pursuits as coating the teacher's bench with nitrogen tri-iodide are no longer possible, which is one reason why students are no longer as attracted to the subject as they once were. This is a great pity because olfactory compounds and explosives both constitute extremely interesting and practical sub-sections of organic chemistry (I accept that explosives also cover some inorganic materials).

I certainly found it a delightful book to browse through. I say "browse through" rather than "read" because it is in the form of a cross between a

dictionary and an encyclopaedia. Some of the entries are mere one liners such as "Thermite, an incendiary composition consisting of 2.75 parts of black iron oxide to one part of granular aluminium", whereas the next entry "Thermodynamic Calculation of Decomposition Reactions" runs to eleven pages of text and twelve pages of tables of data. The book is also comprehensive in its coverage and contains entries such as an article on air bags for cars that one would not normally expect to find in a book on explosives. This article gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "to blow up"! There is also much information that could be dangerous in the wrong hands but discretion dictates that I should not give examples.

The book is closely associated with the Fraunhofer Institut für Chemische Technologie (ICT) and it contains a CD of a demonstration version of the ICT Database of Thermochemical Values. I assume that it was originally written in German but the authors have endeav-

oured to make it as widely available as possible by including in the headings of many articles the equivalent words or phrases in English, German and French and the frontispiece has columns containing key phrases in English, German, French Spanish Russian and another Slavonic language that I could not identify. Throughout an → sign, instead of the more common instruction "cf", refers the reader to other articles that should be consulted in conjunction with the one in question.

Although this is a book clearly intended for those using or manufacturing explosives, it has a much wider interest than this would suggest and it would be a desirable purchase for those involved in teaching undergraduate chemistry in order to be aware of potential hazards and to provide interesting examples of the application of chemistry in the real world.

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