

Safety Committee keeping tabs on toxins

by Jeff Harrington

At Dal, a regrettably low-profile group known as the Environmental, Health and Safety Committee is involved in everything from proposing a no-smoking policy to hazardous waste disposal.

Dr. J.C. Johnson, Director of the committee and head of the Safety Office, meets monthly with representatives from faculties for whom safety is a constant concern, such as Medicine and Chemistry. Together, they review outstanding issues and examine new ones, forwarding recommendations to the university president or the relevant departments as necessary.

Johnson says the university is devoting much more money to safety than in the past. There is now a permanent Safety Office with a full-time secretary. Individual departments pay their "safety" costs from their own budgets.

"We could always use more money," he said, "but I am happy with the money that the university is committing." He mentioned that as much as \$3.5 million could be spent on various improvements.

Indeed, money is only one facet of the challenge. Once a problem

is identified, practical considerations and the ubiquitous red tape can delay the most obvious solution.

Peter Howitt, manager of Engineering Services, Physical Plant and Planning, is in charge of all maintenance and alterations on campus. "At present, we employ over 100 full- and part-time tradesmen," he said. Howitt and Johnson meet once a week to discuss present and future concerns.

While obvious problems such as gas leaks and broken pipes can be fixed quickly, more complex matters take longer. Major overhauls involve engineering studies, design and long-term budgeting before the often time-consuming work can begin.

An "Incinerator Committee", formed in 1986, is still in the process of deciding whether to replace or upgrade the 21-year-old unit in the Tupper Building. This project is expected to cost at least half a million dollars.

For other projects, the time lag is less easily explained. For example, it was noted at a meeting in June of this year that the fire hydrant by the new Chemistry building was being blocked by cars, as no sign was posted to prohibit parking. There is still no sign by the hydrant.

Johnson cited two further areas of particular concern. The first is ventilation.

Although the Tupper Building is "desperately in need of work on its ventilation system," Howitt says it's a matter of freeing the resources. Howitt says he wants to approach the problems methodically and avoid the type of "rush" jobs performed in the 1970s.

One student working in the building this summer found that the air conditioning in his lab didn't work. He was forced to improvise by "popping open" the windows with an Allen wrench to provide ventilation.

The Chemistry building is undergoing extensive renovations slated to run three years. The ventilation in the 74-year-old building was described by Johnson as "inadequate" by modern standards, and will be the next phase undertaken. The ventilation problem has been worsened by fume hoods added after the original system was installed. Although they increase the available work space, they detract from the other hoods' capacity to remove fumes.

The second problem, unsurprisingly, is chemicals. In December 1987, a report compiled by the Safety Committee

concluded:

"A large number of chemicals are being used on campus, some are being used on rare occasions and chemicals are being stored all over the place; mixtures which should not be combined, are. There should be one giant house-keeping effort made to collect everything together and store in a proper manner. Departments have little or no inventory records of their supplies and/or what is taking place with the chemicals.

There seems to be no uniformity where chemical disposal is concerned. There are concerns of potentially carcinogenic chemicals left abandoned in labs. Amounts of chemicals disposed of around campus add up to a significant amount. Where bulk orders are made, there are labs that do not know what is coming in/out of their labs and what is disposed. A good approach to chemical storage with a centralized purchasing system is needed."

Since that report, "a great deal of housekeeping" has been done, Johnson says. Also, a safety audit of the entire university has been completed. At the end of October 1988, a joint initiative on hazardous materials, involving the federal and provincial governments,

manufacturers and "business", will come into effect. Called the Waste and Hazardous Materials Information System, it is an extension of the Occupational Health and Safety Act designed to ensure that all hazardous, corrosive or explosive chemicals are properly labelled.

Given the varieties of chemicals used in so many areas on campus, keeping inventories is a Herculean task. An additional problem is that the people that use the chemicals are not always aware of the environmental and/or health risks. Though many organic solvents are recycled, and more are burned by waste-disposal companies several times a year, others simply go down the drain and into the sewers. Any chemistry student can tell you this.

Within its limitations, the Safety Committee is doing a reasonable job of addressing safety concerns at Dal. However, in view of the increasing pressure on the environment, highlighted by incidents such as the recent PCB fire in Quebec, the Safety Committee should review all forms of waste disposal on campus, including steps to ensure that all students working with chemicals are fully aware of the hazards involved.

Where have all the lockers gone? Locker upkeep too high, Killam sells them all off

by Scott Randall

The lockers in the Killam Library and the Student Union Building were sold to Dalplex this summer, forcing many students to carry their books around campus.

According to Barbara Norwood, administrative assistant for the university libraries, the 150 lockers in the Killam Library caused administrative problems and the library was forced to dispose of them. The lockers had built-in locks which needed frequent repairs and replaced keys at \$25 per key.

Dalhousie Physical Plant said it would cost \$500 to fit latches instead of the permanent locks, with students providing their own locks. The library's budget has been cut by 18 per cent over

the last four years, and since it could not afford to have the locks removed, the library sold the lockers to Dalplex for \$5 each.

Norwood says the library feels badly about discontinuing the locker service. "I think it is a service required by most students," she says. Although there are no plans for new lockers and the space is being used for books, Norwood says, "I think we would still have them if we hadn't had the lock and key problems and the high cost to convert the lockers to a latch device."

Student Union President Juanita Montalvo says the loss of the lockers is unfortunate, since they encourage people to participate in more activities. Since Dalhousie has a large off-campus population, the lockers give stu-

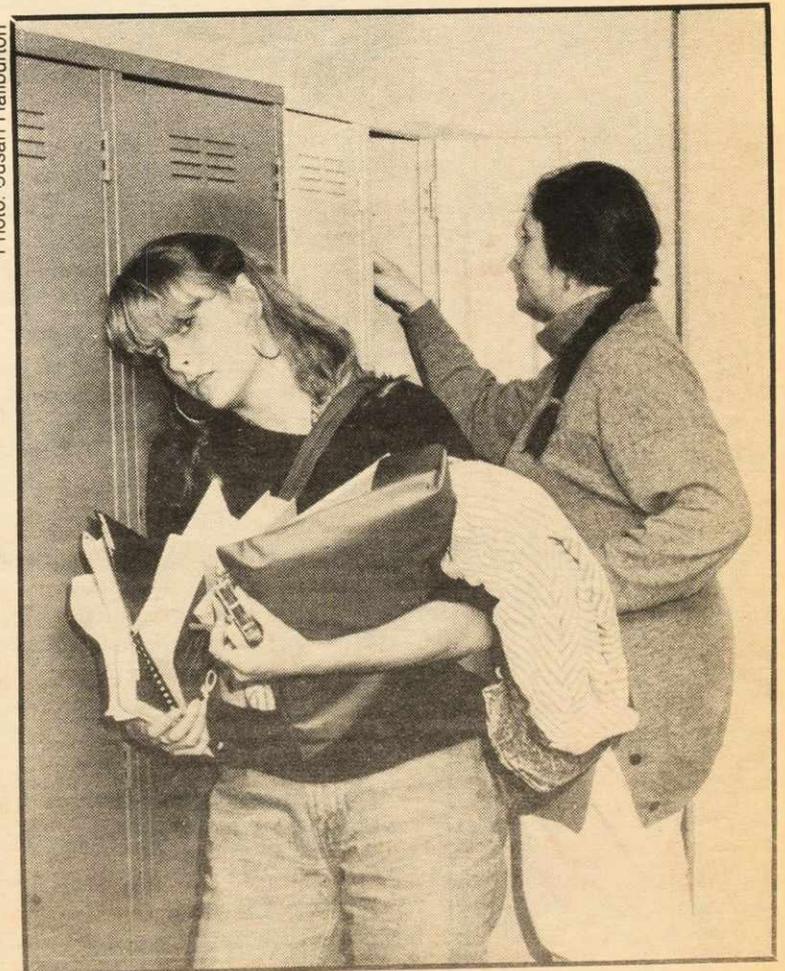
dents more a sense of belonging to the campus, says Montalvo.

The lockers in the SUB had to be removed when the Grawood was moved to the basement from the third floor and was renovated. SUB Manager Steve Gaetz says the lockers cannot be returned because there is too much traffic and because of fire regulations. The lockers will go to the Dalhousie Arena later.

Student Union Vice-President Terry Crawley says no politics were involved in the decision. Although there is no room in the SUB for lockers, the idea of locker rooms will be discussed at a SUB Operations Committee meeting.

Gaetz says there have been many changes at the SUB and students should be patient. About 60 per cent of the building was renovated over the summer.

Photo: Susan Haliburton



Lockers have become frustratingly scarce around campus.