

Women's Centre organizing campus safety audit

by Marina DeLuca

It's dark, you're alone and you're walking across York's main campus: a scene familiar to most students. If you're a man you probably feel relatively safe, but odds are most women in this situation will experience a little fear.

The issue of safety on campus is constantly being raised and the York Women's Centre is attempting to do something to help women feel safer. It is organizing a safety audit, using the Women's Safety Audit Kit.

The material distributed by the Centre at a January 18 meeting was provided by Metro Action Committee on Public Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC).

A safety audit is described in the Women's Safety Audit Kit guidebook as gathering data about certain places in small groups, at various hours of the day for a period of time, in order to determine whether women are exposed to danger in these areas.

Primarily, the auditors develop what the guidebook calls a "checklist," ask questions and make recommendations. Concerns outlined in the book include: escape routes, isolation (could someone see or hear a screaming victim?), lighting, movement predictors and sightlines (is there something which blocks vision?).

Sixteen men and women with a wide range of interests attended the meeting and most were students who live on campus. The general consensus was that escort vans are scarce, that there is a high percentage of women on campus who are attacked, that information regarding danger zones remains unpublished and that, in an emergency situation, a person cannot contact the police directly but must notify York Security first.

Other problems women experience is the locked door: college doors are randomly locked and no one seems to know which doors are open. To a woman trying to outrun an attacker, a locked door can be terrifying.

The safety of the underground tunnel was also questioned. Anger was expressed by many women over an outline on the floor of the tunnel, which is believed to be situated on the spot where an actual sexual assault took place.

A man, who announced he has worked on campus since 1966 with the department of physical plant, said York has always had lighting problems. He contends that one of the most important factors is the individual student's ignorance. There are a lot of people here from small towns, who he is convinced are completely unaware of any danger.

Moreover, the university can only afford certain modifications and he gave examples of staffing problems. Also, one year the lighting system was damaged by staff who hit wires while digging.

He also suggested the drivers of the escort service vans be "given a kick in the you know where." This was a response to women's complaints that the drivers tend to congregate around

variety stores or fast food restaurants.

The issue of the Jane-Finch Corridor was also raised, and Women's Centre representative Ayssa Beckman expressed her concern that one of the biggest assumptions people make is that the danger originates off campus. Those present at the meeting felt this is an unsubstantiated allegation, which is often an excuse for apathy.

Beckman also voiced a need for 24-hour porters to keep trespassers out of the residences. Another student suggested that a system, like the token system used in subways, could be implemented so intruders could not follow students into residence.

METRAC's kit also addresses "opportunity crimes," which are those which occur because of flaws in the environment. Better lit areas, cameras and mirrors dissuade potential attackers.

Money is a prime concern. Safety audits have costs, although volunteer labour will defray some of them. Those

interested in this safety audit will have to lobby the York administration for funds.

Beckman said support for the safety audit has been voiced by the York University Greens, the Advisor to the University on the Status of Women and physical plant.

Ideally, Beckman would like to see the York administration provide funds to enable the Centre to hire an expert to provide advice. Also, more volunteers are required. This will be a student run initiative, said Beckman, and a report will be drawn up for the administration by students.

Although the first meeting served to acquaint those interested with the issues, actual planning did not commence. Hence there is still an opportunity for those interested to contact the Centre.

Spearn resigns

by Mark Wright

York University Development Corporation (YUDC) president Greg Spearn has resigned.

Spearn will be leaving to take a position with Bramalea Ltd. after March 31 when his resignation will take effect. Bramalea Ltd. is the corporation which purchased 22 acres of land from York and plans to build six condominium buildings on the property.

YUDC director of development Ron Hunt said Bramalea Ltd. had been impressed in its dealings and negotiations with Spearn and this led to his being made the offer.

York president Harry Arthurs had only praise for the departing Spearn. "During the past four years he has won the respect of constituencies across the university and has helped us with our goal of creating a fine, new campus," he stated.

Spearn's resignation follows last month's controversial approval of the YUDC's York Lanes project, which the Student Centre Corporation is currently disputing.

Hunt maintains that Spearn's resignation had nothing to do with the SCC's dispute. "His (Spearn's) leaving was totally predicated on his being offered a job in the private sector," Hunt said.

Hunt said that no one has been chosen to replace Spearn at this time but an announcement will be made.



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Quote of the week



"This fraternity bashing must end."

Stephen Offenheim, Master of Alpha Epsilon Pi.