

York lacks funds for \$2.2 million asbestos removal

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Over 150 students picketed outside Osgoode Hall Law School last Thursday, demanding that the University take expedient measures to remove all asbestos from the 18 year old building.

To mark the "Day of Protest," some students donned surgical masks while others carried placards reading "Osgoode students are dying to become lawyers." All classes were cancelled, allowing for faculty and support staff to join the picket line from 10:30-11:30 a.m. without breaching their contractual obligations.

At noon, protesters met with York President Harry Arthurs to present a petition bearing 800 names. The petition called for the University and the provincial government to release the necessary funds for the "complete and immediate" removal of the hazardous carcinogen from Osgoode.

"The meeting was congenial, and we presented our concerns in a formal way," said David McRobert, a member of the Student Committee for Asbestos Removal (SCAR). "As of today (March 12), it is clear that the University is taking us seriously."

Asbestos was originally sprayed on the building's steel support structure as a fire retardant. A 1983 study by D.J. Pinchin Associates recommended that regular air testing of the building be conducted, and that the asbestos be removed.

In January 1986, 20 percent of the asbestos in Osgoode was removed, at a cost of \$177,800 which came from the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). To complete the removal would cost the University an estimated \$2.2-million, according to Bill Farr, Vice President of Finance and Administration.

For the 1986-87 fiscal year, the

MCU granted York \$809,000 for renovations and maintenance, said Del Bell, Director of Communications for the Ministry. This year, the projected budget has decreased \$200,000 to a total of \$607,200.

Bell noted that it is up to the University to determine its own priorities as to allocation of its maintenance funds. He added that "air monitoring of the school has shown that asbestos levels are well within the permissible safety limit."

According to Ian Lithgow, Vice

President of External Relations, York does not have the necessary funds, "given the massive cost involved (for asbestos removal)."

"Our position is that York has not made it a priority on its budgetary request with the government, and the government has not made it a priority in its budget negotiations with the University," said Avi Slodovnick, spokesperson for SCAR. "Let it be clear that we will not accept the runaround from the University or the government; we don't

want to be monkey in the middle," he added.

In his discussion with SCAR representatives last Thursday, Arthurs promised to take up the asbestos issue with the Ministry. He noted, however, that the asbestos removal procedure involves not only funding problems, but also logistical questions regarding the relocation of close to 1,100 Osgoode members during such a project.

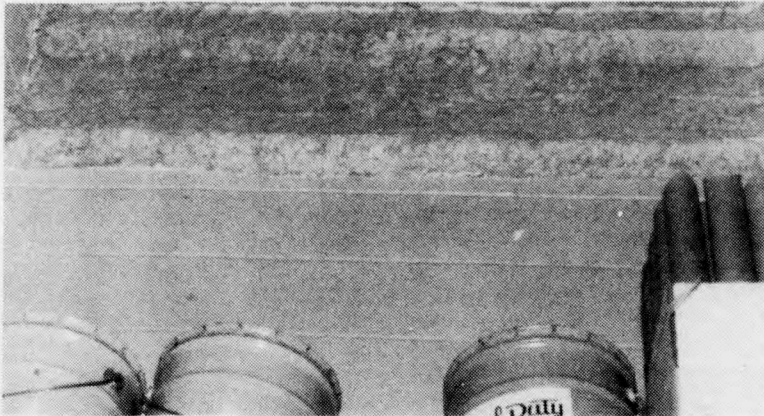
"The (removal) project would be feasible now only if it were under-

taken in conjunction with new space being built," Farr said last week.

President Arthurs also suggested that there may be "a system-wide method" of gaining funding for asbestos removal. He has already approached the Council of Ontario Universities, urging it to conduct a province-wide survey of concern over asbestos in other universities.

A delegation of SCAR representatives will meet with Gregory Sorbara, Minister of Colleges and Universities, within the next week.

Asbestos exposed in storage rooms



THE REAL THING: Asbestos in the ceilings of Osgoode.

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Upon learning that at least five caretaking or storage rooms in Osgoode contain exposed asbestos, Gilles Arsenault, a York staff member who works in the law school printing area, has decided to lodge a grievance against the University.

Administrators in the department of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) would not disclose the exact location of the five potentially hazardous rooms. However, *Excalibur* has learned that storage rooms 023 and 021, both near the Osgoode

printing room, contain exposed asbestos along their ceilings. Room 013, a "Danger-High Voltage" Electrical room, also has uncovered asbestos sprayed along its ceiling beams.

Arsenault, who has been a York employee for three years, did not find out that the asbestos in room 023 was unprotected until CBC television crews were ushered into the room during last Thursday's "Day of Protest" at Osgoode.

"I was under the impression that all areas containing asbestos were

covered," Arsenault told *Excalibur*. "The least they (the University) could have done is tell us about the asbestos and advise us as to precautionary measures."

"This incident is now inexcusable," Arsenault concluded. He is presently filing a grievance with the York University Faculty Association against the OHS department.

According to David Kurosky, Director of OHS, the asbestos in the Osgoode storage rooms is "not imminently dangerous." Nevertheless, the Department took air samples of the room Tuesday, and expects the results of the testing to be available by Friday.

"We're testing the rooms simply to ease the anxieties of an employee regarding asbestos," Kurosky said. "Our actions are not being prompted by the asbestos being a health hazard, but rather as a control measure," he added.

The Department is presently considering either enclosure or removal of the toxic asbestos in the storage rooms. Kurosky noted, however, that "enclosure would, in the long term, cost almost as much as removal. In this case, it makes better sense to remove (the asbestos)."



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Ministry of Colleges and Universities
Ontario

Hon. Gregory Sorbara, Minister
Alan K. Adlington, Deputy Minister

