

Presence of date rape drug suspected at McMaster

BY SARAH SCHMIDT

HAMILTON (CUP) — The date rape drug Rohypnol is suspected to be at the root of several sexual assaults in the Hamilton area, including one at McMaster University.

Issuing a press statement Jan. 30, the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police warned the community that they have identified a series of sexual assaults in the new year where Rohypnol is believed to have been used.

One of the three cases under investigation occurred at The Downstairs John, one of McMaster's undergraduate pubs.

"We're putting a full media blitz out," said Staff Sergeant Paul Morrison of the Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Police. "We're making it very well known."

Rohypnol comes in white or light-pink coloured pills and is 10 times more potent than Valium. It works almost immediately, producing the equivalent of an alcoholic blackout and is often accompanied by temporary paralysis.

The drug is odourless, colourless and tasteless. When spiked in a drink, it is virtually undetectable and makes unsuspecting women easy prey, since they may black out and not remember the sexual assault.

Jeff Dockeray, manager of undergraduate pubs for McMaster's student union, says the

news about the possibility of the date rape drug being used at a university pub is very disturbing.

"It's shocking to us. We have never come across such incidents," he said. Entry to McMaster undergraduate pubs is restricted to students with a valid university identification card and guests signed in by students.

Dockeray says he won't speculate on whether the McMaster case involved a student from the university.

"I would hope it's not running wild on this campus," he said.

As an awareness step, more posters about sexual assault, date rape and Rohypnol went up last weekend at campus pubs to make

sure the students are aware of the recent incident.

Mary Keyes, assistant vice-president of student affairs, says the university has been informing students about the date rape drug, also known as the "forget-me-pill" or "roofies", for two years now. But with the latest news, the university printed up more fact sheets and distributed them to all on-campus residents.

Rohypnol has also been in the shadows on other university campuses.

Last March, a University of Toronto student approached the campus police to report having experienced symptoms matching those induced by Rohypnol. She

suspects a stranger who was making advances towards her at an off-campus bar may have slipped it in her drink.

This U of T account fell on the heels of the report of a McGill University student leaving a university pub after experiencing similar symptoms. Both women had made prior arrangements to meet up with friends and were brought home safely.

Neither woman was tested within the requisite 72 hours for evidence of the drug in their systems.

Len Paris, U of T's safety coordinator, says more work needs to be done as a result of the McMaster revelation.

"I think we should turn the heat up on what we're doing," he said.

Rohypnol is manufactured by Hoffman-La Roche and is marketed in 64 countries as a prescription drug. It is not for sale in Canada or the U.S., but is currently manufactured in Mexico, Europe, Asia and South America. It can, however, be brought into the country if prescribed by a foreign physician.

The company has recently reformulated the drug causing it to turn blue in a light-coloured drink as well as form small chunky pieces. But it will take some time for the new product to reach the markets through which it is brought into Canada.

Women train at UVic to fight fires

BY ANDREA MCLAGAN

VICTORIA (CUP) — A research project on women firefighters is heating up the University of Victoria campus.

UVic's Sport and Fitness Center is wrapping up an experimental training program aimed at giving women a better chance at becoming forest firefighters.

Thirty women participated in an intensive 13-week fitness program in preparation for the test B.C. Forest Services uses to screen applicants for forest

firefighter positions. Between 50 and 100 are hired each summer.

Applicants are screened by the service for strength, aerobic fitness and endurance.

"Basically we're trying to determine if women of different fitness levels who train hard can prepare themselves successfully for this test," said Lynne Wolski, Sport and Fitness Center coordinator.

It is harder for women to meet the strength requirement than men, says Wolski, because men naturally have greater upper body strength.

"We're hoping for a 15 to 20 percent pass rate on the test. I think that would be really good...this shows that if women do the training program and train hard, they can [pass the test]," Wolski said.

Researchers gave participants, who ranged in age from 19 to 37, an aerobic and weight training program based on the forest service's. It includes shuttle runs, carrying a 65-pound pump, and transporting filled and empty hoses.

Approximately 10 per cent of the 800 summer firefighters in B.C.

are women, but the Forest Service is trying to encourage more women to apply, says Wendy Stewart, spokesperson for the B.C. Forest Service Protection Program.

"We encourage people of all groups to apply, but there are not as many minority groups applying as we'd like to see," she said. "It used to be that 'girls' didn't fight fires. But with the change in attitude recently, people have started encouraging women to get out there and do it."

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