Another problem is the lack of knowledge regarding low-level exposures to asbestos, according to Ison. Most research on exposure has been done in areas with an extremely high concentration of fibres in the air, such as factories and asbestos mines. Because of the lack of low-level research, there is a void in safety regulations; there is no known "safe level."

The Ministry of Labour has guidelines as to what is safe, but Ison emphasizes that these "reflect economic, administrative, and political criteria." He states that the Ministry's guidelines have no "scientific data base." His conclusions about the Ministry's guidelines are similar to those he draws about a 1984 Royal Commission report on the use of asbestos (as opposed to its removal).

"Who provides input into that kind of Royal Commission?" Ison asks. "It's very heavily dependent on people who are experts on the subject of asbestos in buildings. What sorts of interests do people like that have?

"I'd call [removal] a high priority, [but] we have many things that are high priority."
PETER STRUK

Obviously, if you're an expert on the subject of asbestos in buildings, your career is going to come to a quick end if all the asbestos is out of the buildings. It's not too surprising if you devise various control mechanisms for leaving the asbestos in."

While Ison admits that a test of low-level areas would be difficult, he points out that there have been cases of asbestos-related diseases caused by low levels. He cites cases of families of asbestos workers, who have contracted diseases solely from the worker's clothes.

There are no known cases of asbestos-related disease among York students and staff, but Ison emphasizes that this fact does not necessarily indicate safety. He explains that such diseases are difficult to attribute to a particular cause. In the case of lung cancer, for instance, the disease could be caused by "the compound and sometimes synergistic interaction of multiple contaminants."

In addition, "one would expect the asbestos insulation to retain its physical integrity during the early years of the building, and one would not expect significant exposures during that period."

This, in combination with the latency period of asbestos-related diseases (a minimum of 10 years for adults), would make the asbestos' effects invisible until noticeable "manifestations" several years from now.

There are two viable solutions to the asbestos problem: encapsulation and removal.

Encapsulation, as its name suggests, encloses the asbestos in a liquid coating which hardens to form a shell. Ison points out that this method has already been used in some parts of the Law School. Yet, he emphasizes that encapsulation is not foolproof, as its success relies on the quality and condition of the asbestos it covers.

"Efficiency is required in its prescription and application, and even then there is no guarantee how long it will last," Ison states. "Monitoring of the ambient air is still required, and the encapsulation requires periodic renewal."

Ison says that if the asbestos under the covering is not solid, the insulation and its coating will fall off, still risking the contamination of the air.

The other possible solution is removal, the only solution which Ison and his colleagues find acceptable. Ison says that removal is inevitable and there is a only a question of when it will happen. He emphasizes that a planned removal is better than a rushed one, in response to some "sudden discovery of high levels of contamination."

A planned removal would be both economical—compared to the ongoing cost of maintenance—and protective, without disrupting the activities within the building too much.

"As time goes by," says Ison, "the risk and the costs of leaving it in go up. The risk for the sudden need of an unplanned removal increases."

Such a removal, in an emergency, would require immediate evacuation of the building, says Ison, and would require the temporary relocation of the Law School.

Ison says that a planned removal has not yet been done, largely due to a lack of funding.

"There's always a tendency in any growing administration," he says, "to look at the cost of doing something and not look at the cost of not doing it."

He pointed out that the cost of removal may, in fact, be less than that of leaving it in, when the costs of maintenance over the years are taken into account.

He also says that the price of removal would be less than the legal costs involved in defending the University, should a claim be brought against it due to asbestos-related illness.

"The cost of removal could be less than the cost of two claims for asbestos-related diseases," states Ison. "The cost would be a trifle compared to the possible risks of the claims, if there was a fire dumping asbestos on the outside community."

A fire in the Ukraine last year spewed asbestos all over the surrounding areas, demonstrating the danger of leaving the material in.

". . . there are disagreements, perhaps, about what the attendant risks are of being in the building."
PROFESSOR ERIC TUCKER

But there have been many problems with the actual removal of the substance. Professor Reuben Hasson, also a member of OARC, explains that in the late '70s, "most of the people that were pressing for the asbestos to be removed were people on the left, and this came to be seen as some kind of political contest."

He said that over the eight years existence of the Removal Committee, "students who were knowledgeable [about asbestos] and aggressive would graduate, and the faculty—with very few exceptions—was not interested. They just didn't know or didn't want to know about asbestos."

However, Hasson points out that this situation has changed. "I think there's been an appreciation on the part of the administration that something has to be done."

He believes that the administration "fail[ed] to understand how dangerous asbestos was and [relied too much] on the 'experts'."

"The experts said that it is no more dangerous than the ambient air, which is true. But it doesn't take into account the aging process. It doesn't take into account something like the earth tremor which we had a couple of months ago. And it doesn't take into account blizzards and things that shake the building up."

If the university can get the funding, says Assistant Vice-President of Physical Plant Peter Struk, then the asbestos will be removed.

"I'd call [removal] a high priority," he explained, "[but] we have many things that are high priority. If the Ministry will allocate more funds to allow us flexibility to attend to all our high priority items, we will look at asbestos removal as soon as possible."

At an OARC meeting last December, Struk said he would look into the purchase of a FAM machine for air testing.

Struk, however, doesn't seem to consider the asbestos in the air plenum particularly dangerous. His primary concern, as exemplified by the removals already done, is asbestos exposed to the open air, with nothing separating it from the work environment, such as a ceiling. Struk maintained that, ultimately, economic factors decide the fate of the asbestos. As he explained it, "It was within our ability to have it removed."

While he explained the university's desire for removal, Struk also believes that that the asbestos situation is under control.

"There's a direct instructions to everybody in Osgoode that they're not to remove the ceiling tile and, in fact, there's a complete control programme if anybody's going to be dealing with in in that nature."

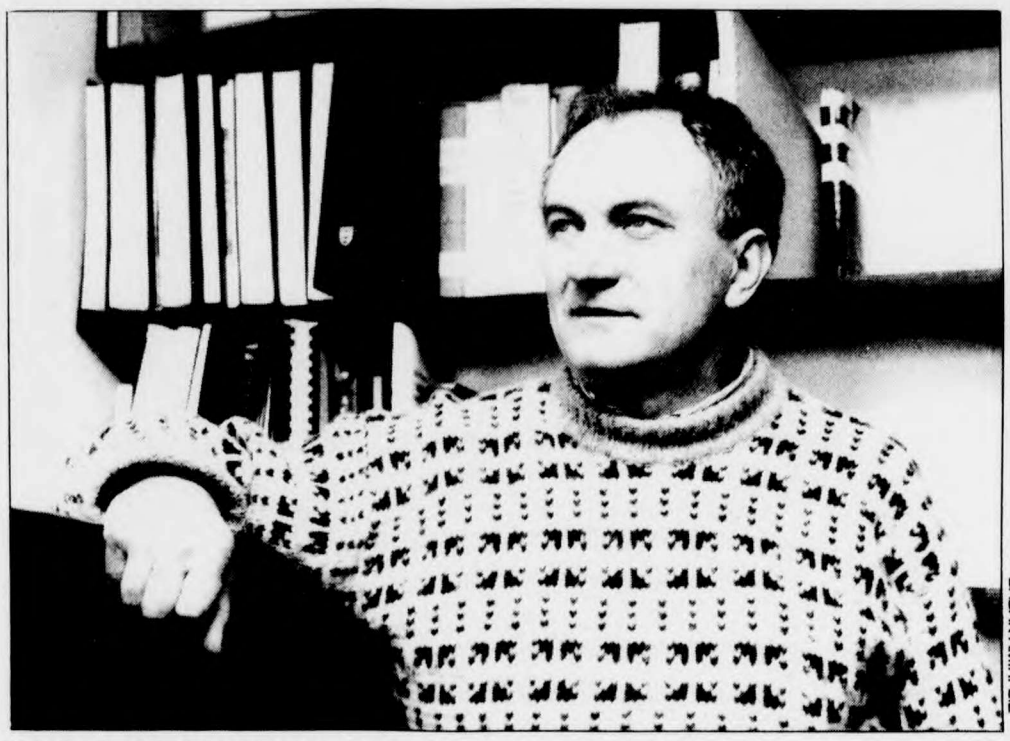
The OARC disagrees. Professor Eric Tucker, a member of OARC, believes that the students this year may not be well-informed about the effects of asbestos exposure, and if they are uninformed, the control programme will serve little purpose.

"There has been at least one article in the student newspaper here [Osgoode's *Obiter Dicta*]," said Tucker. "There's been, perhaps, not enough done this year to warn people about what the situation is and let them know about some of the risks that they potentially face as users of this building."

Tucker, who chaired OARC at the time of the rally nearly two years ago, feels that if more were done, the situation would be better.

"We've suggested, for example, that there should be a warning in the Osgoode bulletin for all prospective students letting them know that this is a building with asbestos in it and that there are attendant risks to using such a location. But, for obvious reasons, people in administrative capacities are not keen to make that an issue prominently known in the literature we distribute."

Tucker emphasized that ". . . there are disagreements, perhaps, about what the attendant risks are of being in the building, and the way you present that information makes a significant amount of difference in the way that people react to it." He sees the problem as being one where the administration communicates one message, while he and fellow professors present another; while the university paints a picture of reassurance, Tucker and OARC are aware of certain dangers.


BABAK AMIRI-EIZ

WORKING FOR A SAFER LAW SCHOOL: Professor Terence Ison is chair of the Osgoode Asbestos Removal Committee.

"It's not as if there's a disagreement that people should be informed," Tucker said. "It's a disagreement about when people should be informed and the way the information should be presented."

Egils Tannis, a University Affairs Officer with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, called the asbestos problem "a question of priorities." He said that York was allotted a renovations budget of $1,896,000 for the academic year 1988-89, and is slated for a budget of $1,422,000 next year. The money can be used for anything that the Ministry permits as being renovations, such as re-roofing, purchasing new windows . . . and asbestos removal.

"They (York's administration) don't seem to see any problems," Tannis said, "it's up to the university to decide its own priorities."

Next week, from February 27 to March 3, Osgoode Hall is hosting Asbestos Awareness Week in Central Square and the Law School. There will be films, as well as a panel discussion on the effects of asbestos exposure. For more information, contact the Student Committee for Asbestos Removal at extension 7528.