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Radiation poisoning uncovers safety lapse at U of T

TORONTO (CUP)—The radiation poisoning of a University of Toronto lab technician has brought to light numerous violations of security and safety regulations at the institution.

Last summer it was discovered lab technician Winnifred Asico had an abnormally radiated thyroid. Shortly afterwards radio-active iodine was discovered in Asico's jar of Coffeemate, which was stored in a lab containing radioactive substances.

"Safety at U of T is not good at all. They are very lax," said Asico.

She cited a number of violations of safety and security regulations in the research labs at U of T:

- eating and drinking in labs containing radioactive substances.
- food put in refrigerators containing radioactive substances.
- labs left unlocked.

Bill Ridge, director of the University of Toronto Radiation Protection Authority (UTRPA), agrees there are serious safety problems at U of T.

After so many years you tend to become complacent and you need a jolt like (the Asico case) to shake you up," Ridge said.

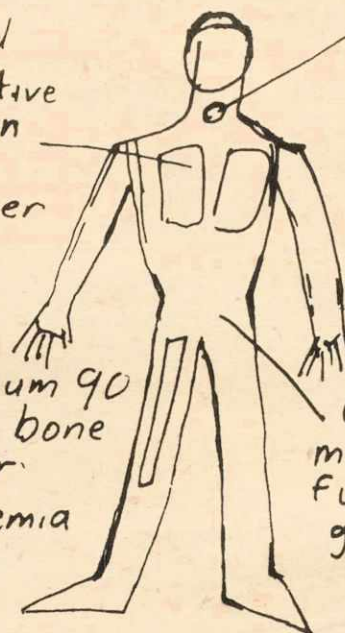
To improve safety, Ridge said, the UTRPA has hired three employees to "check that doors are properly locked and to collect some radioactive waste." The UTRPA has also produced a "Manual of Safety Operations" and a memorandum noting particular regula-

Inhaled
radioactive
krypton
causes
lung cancer

Strontium 90
causes bone
cancer
leukaemia

SITES OF RADIATION DAMAGE

Children are more susceptible than adults



Radioactive
Iodine causes
cancer of
thyroid

Radioactive
cesium
accelerates
ageing

Genetic
mutations for
future
generations

tions which have been violated.

News of the Asico incident only became known when a memo from Ken McNeill, Chairperson of the UTRPA, was leaked to the media. The memo requested information on workers handling radioactive materials. The information requested was for the Atomic Energy Control Board (AECB) and states "two incidents have occurred within the last year: one, the ingestion by a technician of significant quantities of radioactive iodine and the other, theft of radioisotopes in the Medical Sciences Building."

"They worked hard for me

personally," Asico said, "but not so much over the hazards of occupational health and safety at U of T."

Currently, atomic radiation workers at the University are protected only by the guidelines set by the AECB and UTRPA since atomic radiation workers are not protected by the provincial occupational health and safety act. This act would allow workers to refuse unsafe working conditions.

Asico's poisoning caused AECB officials to delay the renewal of the University's licence to use radioactive materials. The licence was renewed in August.

Students may sue U of M

WINNIPEG (CUP)—A class of psychology students at the University of Manitoba may sue the school for "educational malpractice."

The decision follows the victory of the class of graduate students to have the grades assigned by their professor overturned. The students went before the university's board of graduate studies to protest professor Harvey Keselman's unusual teaching methods.

Ken Zaifman, the students' lawyer, said this is the first time an entire class has campaigned together to protest a professor's instruction and examination methods.

"Students are again beginning to assert their rights in the classroom in a way reminiscent of the 60's," he said.

Two students had failed the course but the university records of all the students now show only that they passed the course.

The students say Keselman gave them insufficient time to finish tests throughout the year and that the final exam contained typographical errors and blurred printing. They also said they had been tested

on subjects which had not been taught in the course.

Zaifman said a number of the exams given to the students were speed tests.

"It's awfully hard to do a speed test when you can't even read it," he said.

Keselman said he feels the decision puts academic freedom in danger.

"I'm concerned with the prospect in the coming years of some committee coming forth with guidelines to the instructor concerning time limits for examining students."

The issue of academic freedom is not in question,

according to Zaifman. If academic freedom means lack of fairness in the classroom then something is wrong with people's sense of academic freedom.

Keselman disputes the committee's ability to judge on non-course related material. He says the time needed to complete an exam is known only to a person with an expert knowledge of the material.

The students are now considering suing the university for "breach of contract and educational malpractice" to entrench students' right to get a satisfactory education.

