

University stores low-level waste in drums

By DOUG FICK
Of the Emerald

Dump closures won't hurt labs

Despite the closure of nuclear waste disposal facilities in Arizona and Hanford, Wash., University research is not being crippled by radioactive waste storage problems, says Bob Sudmann, a University health physicist.

"It's a problem, but it's a manageable problem," Sudmann says.

Radioactive waste from University science laboratories is now being stored in steel drums locked in secure basement areas, he says.

The Hanford site was closed Oct. 4 by Washington Gov. Dixie Lee Ray, who claimed the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was not maintaining tight enough safety conditions at the facility.

Sudmann says the University's waste materials contain only trace amounts of radioactivity and presents no safety problems. The waste usually consists of solid and liquid materials used in scientific experiments, including vials,

beakers, and the chemical compounds tridium, carbon, sulfur and some iodine 125.

The University Health Sciences Center in Portland is also unaffected by the closure, says Bill Vermeere, head of waste disposal at the center. The center fills 12 to 15 barrels with radioactive waste every six weeks, he says.

The health science waste is also low level, Vermeere says, explaining that one of the chemical compounds is used in making reflective road signs, which have radiation levels comparable to "a few cookies."

The University recycles much of its solid waste material and according to Sudmann, recycling significantly decreases the volume of the materials being stored.

Normally, the Nuclear Engineering Company, which operates the Hanford

site, picks up University waste materials, but most facilities with radioactive waste must ship it to storage dumps themselves, he says.

"Since they come and pick it up from us it's a whole different situation. A whole different bag of worms," Sudmann says.

Although the University is not hard hit by waste disposal problems, Sudmann says universities, research laboratories and other facilities on the East Coast are being severely crippled by disposal problems.

"The guys that are really in trouble are the guys back East," he says.

Sudmann cites an incident involving New York City's Columbia University, which recently attempted to send a load of low-radiation waste to a South Carolina disposal facility. The facility denied permission to dump the waste because of its low radiation level. A chemical

disposal plant also denied dumping permission because of the chemical's flammability and the truck was unable to get rid of the material.

"It's a Catch-22 situation. Everything is legal, but nobody can take it," Sudmann says.

Warren Wacker of the Harvard University health services division says Harvard is storing its waste and waiting for an opportunity to dispose of it. Harvard's waste materials also have low radiation levels, he says.

Much of the waste disposal problem can be traced to the dumping of low-level wastes in disposal facilities, Sudmann says.

"They are filling up radioactive dumps with materials that could be dumped down the drain," he says.

Sudmann advocates a search to find alternative disposal methods for low-level waste materials. Alternatives include separate dumps for low-radiation waste and incineration of the material, he says.

Whitelaw earns award; professor of the month

Economics Professor Ed Whitelaw, Mortar Board's Professor of the Month for November, describes himself as "demanding, but not belligerently so."



Photo by Steve Dykes

Ed Whitelaw

Explaining that lectures alone don't have much impact on learning, Whitelaw says, "There is no substitute for repetition and the frequency of adversity."

Instead of the usual midterm-final grading format, his students take weekly quizzes, do homework and get surprised with "gotcha" pop-quizzes. Whitelaw says this format encourages student interaction inside and outside of class.

Even in a class of 200

students, he tries to learn all the students' names. This "breaks barriers," Whitelaw says.

Crediting his teaching success to student interaction and his enthusiasm, Whitelaw smiles and says, "I'm loud and enthusiastic and amicable. It merely eases the pain of having to learn at a fairly rapid rate."

Receiving this honor is "nice" and a step in the right direction, but "it doesn't substitute for the recognition the University should give teachers," Whitelaw says. Monetary rewards are necessary too, he adds.

The University is biased toward faculty with ability in research, in giving promotion and tenure, he says. This is "detrimental to undergraduate teaching."

Research work and keeping current class lists are important, Whitelaw says, but adds, "There is a clear trade-off between good teaching and publishing ability."

Mortar Board, an academic honor society for seniors, created the Professor of the Month award to recognize outstanding teaching at the University. Nomination forms for next month's award are available at the grievance center in the EMU lobby, and should be returned to the center by Dec. 1. The Emerald will announce each month's selection.

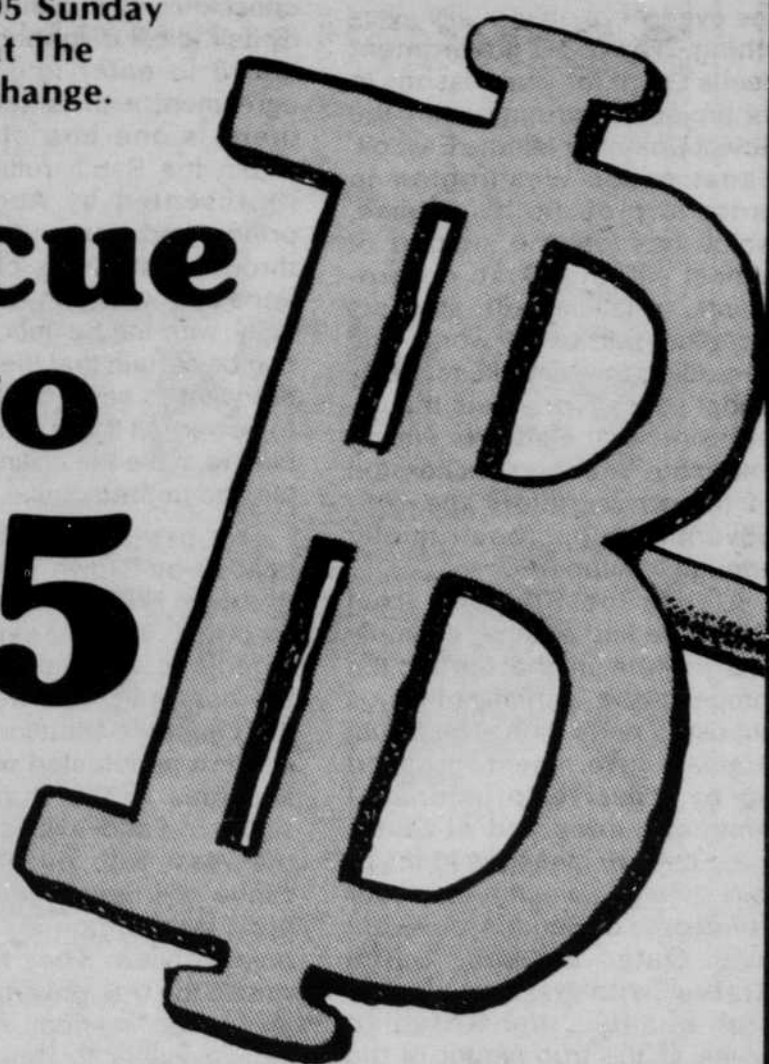
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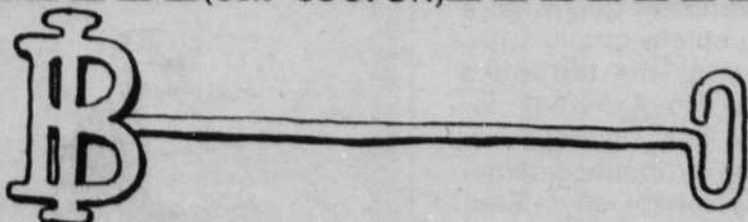
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