

Hamilton— chemical polluter?

by Sara Schwieder

Every hour of every day, the air vents atop Hamilton Hall expel chemical wastes from the chemistry laboratories. Every day chemicals that have been used in experiments go down the drain into the Lincoln sewer system.

Neither chemistry department nor environmental health officials seem to know the quantity or kinds of chemicals expelled from the building, but they term the pollution effect "minimal."

"There is a wide variety of chemicals released into the air, but we don't know the amounts," according to George Sturgeon, chemistry labs director. "We've never taken any measure of the chemicals that go down the drain, either, but I would think it is a very small quantity."

Sturgeon said he thinks most chemicals are sufficiently neutralized and diluted before they are dumped, but said the chemistry department has no official policy or guidelines to ensure against chemical pollution of the city sewer system.

A small blue booklet titled "Laboratory Waste Disposal Manual" offers guidelines for neutralizing and diluting chemicals before they are disposed of, but Sturgeon said the chemistry department only has three copies and their use is not encouraged or required by the department.

"No one is making sure that they (proper procedures) are followed," he said. "It's in the hands of individual researchers, who are expected to be professional, and it's up to them to be careful."

Edward Simpson, chief of Environmental Health and Safety of the University, said he didn't know how much chemical wastes were poured down the drain, but he was sure it was a small amount.

"Large quantities, like barrels, of chemicals aren't put down the drain, and the small amounts that do go down are diluted terrifically. They have an infinitesimal effect on the sewage system."

He said that the UNL city campus has a sewer usage of 24 million gallons a month which dilutes the chemicals from Hamilton Hall to a safe level.

Also, experimenters are required to keep a complete log of all chemicals used.

Although environmental health officials haven't measured the kinds of or quantities of chemicals that are expelled into the air by the

hoods atop Hamilton Hall, the dilution factor again renders laboratory chemicals harmless, Simpson said.

"We require a certain velocity of air in each hood to help dilute the chemicals," he said. "The hoods also are for laboratory users because it prevents them from breathing concentrated chemicals in the laboratory."

The chemistry department has a license for low level radioactive materials. One or two dozen graduate students use radioactive materials in their experiments, Sturgeon said.

The air hoods are equipped with filters that provide "absolute protection" from possible radioactive danger to the city, Simpson said.

"We remove the old filters, monitor the radioactive energy to make sure it doesn't exceed safe levels, and then bury it at the Mead Experiment Station," Simpson said.

He said he didn't know what quantity of "regular chemicals" is expelled from the building. Sturgeon said "regular chemicals"—those other than radioactive chemicals—might include strong acids, caustics, poisons like cyanide or strychnine.

"Some things (released into the air) are hazardous," Sturgeon said. "There are acid fumes which contribute to decaying buildings, certainly a minimal amount, but the day by day effect is nonetheless real."

He said the chemistry department is trying to set up stations in the stockrooms to handle heavy metals like mercury or zinc. He said some of the chemistry department budget was being devoted to solving heavy metal waste problems.

Both Sturgeon and Simpson mentioned wholesale dumping into the city sewer system when the chemistry department moved from Avery Hall to Hamilton Hall two years ago.

"I know that terrific amounts were dumped when the chemistry department moved," Sturgeon said. "I would say what goes down the drains now isn't anything like when we left Avery. It involved copious amounts."

Simpson said a lot of unlabeled chemicals were dumped during the move from Avery.

Both men said chemicals are expensive and that the chemistry dept. is careful with disposal for economic as well as ecological reasons.

Some chemicals, like mercury, are recycled. "Dirty mercury," that which has been used, sells for \$7 to \$16 a pound.

When mercury is accidentally spilled on campus, a special vacuum is used by environmental health officials to collect it.

Campus registration favors Democrats

Last week's UNL voter registration drive added 845 new voters to the county's books. An additional 195 already registered took advantage of the on-campus service to reregister at a new address.

Democrat registrations narrowly edged out Republican's 372-326 in the drive. Another 147 new registrants declared themselves independents.

Bill Davidson, Lancaster County election commissioner, at first had declined to permit a voter registration drive outside of the City-County Building so close to election day.

However, after a meeting with Innocents Society members Chris Harper and Bill Lock, Davidson agreed to a three-day registration drive in the Nebraska Union.

Students have until Oct. 27 to register for the Nov. 7 general election. They may do so at the City-County Building at 10th and J Streets.

Students plan formation of state lobbyist group

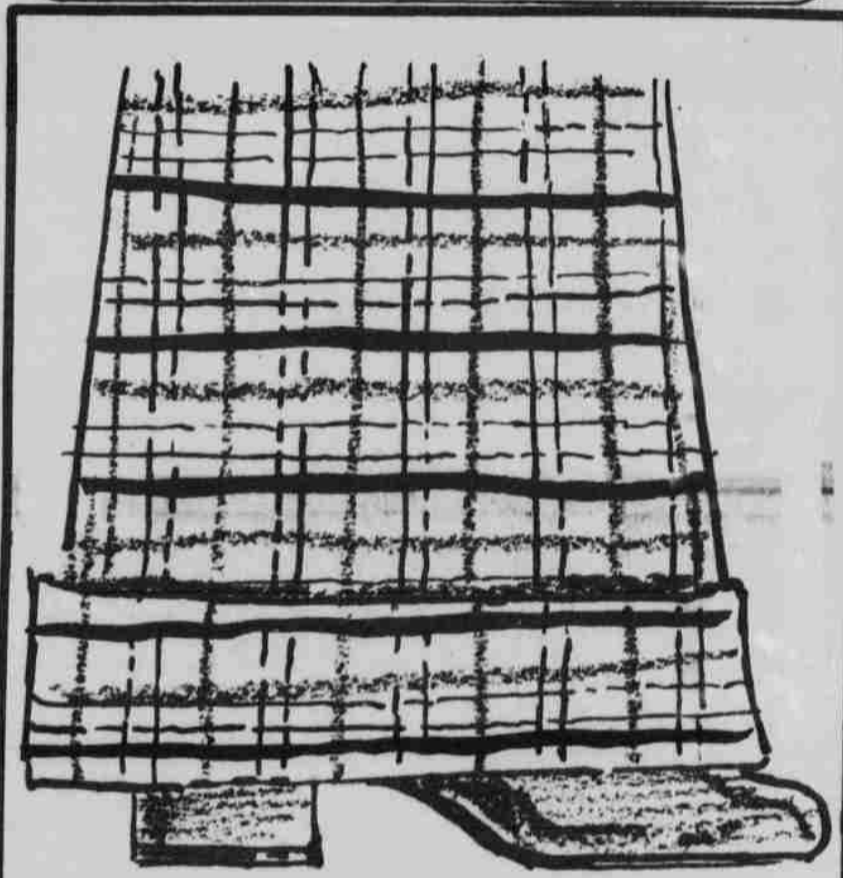
Representatives from at least half of the state's colleges plan to meet in Lincoln Saturday to discuss possible formation of a state-wide student lobby.

J. James Plant, organizer and former lobbyist, noted several years ago the Nebraska Student Government Association attempted to serve in a lobbying function but said it failed.

According to Plant, ASUN has been the only student organization regularly represented in the Nebraska Legislature in recent years.

The proposed lobby, Plant estimates, would need \$4,500 to function in its first year. Hopefully it would concern itself with "constructive" issues rather than ones of philosophy, he said.

Lt. Gov. Frank Marsh, who presides over the Legislature, will address the group Saturday. Michelle Gagne, representing ASUN, will attend.



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UNL students 'naive,' thank you

by John Russnogle

"Students at the University are naive, but cooperative and have good manners."

That's the way English professor Robert Knoll described UNL students Monday night.

The New Faculty Orientation program he spoke at focused on the type of student and student response new faculty members should expect in their classes.

Knoll said the cooperation and the pleasantness of students does have disadvantages. Students allow faculty to "get away with too much," he said.

The result is faculty members are not challenged and can become mediocre teachers, according to Knoll.

Student identity and student rights also were discussed in a commentary between Ken Bader, vice chancellor for student affairs and Ned Hedges, assistant to the vice chancellor for academic affairs.

UNL students come from an agriculture setting but are not all from farms, Hedges said.

"They're not plough jockeys and 'farmer's daughters,'" he said.

Hedges said students reflect a spirit of independence which thrives in Nebraska. Some persons would call Nebraskan's independence "conservatism," but Hedges said he thought it can be considered liberal or conservative.

Students are self-reliant and more trusting because of their Nebraskan background, he said.

Students were accused of being "great conformists" by Hedges. He said several years ago no female students would have considered attending class in blue jeans and a sweat shirt. Student dress today is just as much a uniform as it was before, according to Hedges.

Hedges told new faculty members that students do possess certain rights.

He stressed the student's right to freedom of expression in the classroom, to a course description and knowing the grading procedure early in the semester and the right to expect his teacher to be available for conferences.

"Students are not puppets who become people after they graduate," Hedges said.