



The newly rebuilt chemical shed.

## Cass chemical burning leaves questions

### Unsafe storage procedures trigger crisis

**B**adly organized storage, inaccurate records, and infrequent chemical checks led to the burning of the chemical storage shed behind the Cass building on August 2nd.

At an undetermined point in time a bottle of liquid that stored picric acid was cracked and the liquid leaked "Probably while someone was moving things and didn't notice" says Dr. Eliot, President of UPEI.

Picric acid is a chemical used for staining. "When kept in liquid it is very stable, but when not it has all the characteristics of TNT." This

presented the university with a very dangerous situation. Even the slightest friction could set off an explosion.

University officials went over all the possible ways of dealing with the problem. "In the end everyone agreed that [burning the shed] was the best way to do it". It was a decision that proved harder than planned. When reviewing what chemicals had to be and could be removed safely the university found forty unlabelled containers. This led to the hiring of a chemical analyst from California who identified them, and they were disposed of along with the others.

This situation raises some serious questions about the storage of chemicals at UPEI. Are the students and faculty safe? One science student voices a concern that many others feel. "It is discomfoting to know that things are not properly taken care of" says Student Union Vice President-Internal (VPI) Andrew MacPherson; however, Dr. Eliot insists that the university has learned from the past. Obviously the science department was not making frequent enough checks, or keeping accurate records.

President Eliot stated that all the storage procedures and record keeping practices have been reviewed and are in the process of being improved. "We are now changing to have much better storage."

Unfortunately, this is not only a problem here at UPEI. Many high schools across the Island have poor storage and record keeping. This could lead to more dangerous situations,

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Student Union  
Vice-President  
Internal

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and those might not happen conveniently in the middle of the summer as was the case at UPEI.

The burning of the shed and chemicals did not have many negative effects environmentally. Dr. Eliot said they were worried about the direction of the smoke because of the nearby residential areas, but fortunately the air was calm on the day of the fire.

The water in the shed after the fire was highly acidic, so it was treated to balance the PH level and then drained.

The expense of the whole operation was approximately \$30,000-\$40,000. UPEI's contingency fund covered the expense. Dr. Eliot says he is not worried about the money, adding, "It's not the cost of the project that is important, it is the safety of the university."

REBECCA MOORE