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# YORKVISION

# RADIUM ROD SWEEP OUT WITH THE TRASH



Image by Alex Papushoy

## EXCLUSIVE

BY ADAM THORN

A RADIOACTIVE chemical ended up DUMPED in a SCRAPYARD after a senior Biology lecturer lost it while attempting to deconstruct a Radium machine without permission.

University ground staff then inadvertently swept away the Radium, before a TRACTOR drove it to a "waste transfer station" in York. The situation followed a mix up involving which type of container held the Radium.

The findings form part of a secret admin investigation, obtained by Vision, which details how the Biology department made a horrific catalogue of rookie errors in dealing with the situation. Some of the damning conclusions it reaches are that:

- Biology lecturers and technicians paid "little or no attention to the health and safety of themselves and others".
- Grounds Maintenance Employees had undertaken: "an unauthorised disposal of scrap metals from the University, using equipment not designed or even appropriate for carrying out the job"
- And how: "The level of competency evidenced by the actions of the Radiation Protection Supervisor is a concern"

The revelations come almost a year after we broke the story that the substance, Radium 226, vanished from the University for five days. Now for the first time we can finally reveal the extraordinary chain of mistakes that led to its disappearance.

FULL STORY PAGE 4-5

## SECRET REPORT EXPOSED

**Biology lecturers and technicians paid "little or no attention to the health and safety of themselves and others".**

# RADIOACTIVE

## > SECRET REPORT BLAMES SENIOR BIOLOGY LECTURER FOR LOSING RADIUM



BY ADAM THORN

ONE OF YORK'S top lecturer's has been blamed for losing a Radioactive chemical last year, after attempting to deconstruct a Radium machine without permission and without following key university rules.

A secret admin report reveals how a tractor drove 'Radium 226' to a York scrap metal merchant's before being forwarded to a Recycling plant in Sheffield where it was recovered.

The investigation makes a series of damning conclusions that attack almost every element of the handling of the loss. It added that our lecturers within the Biology department paid: "little or no attention to the health and safety of themselves and others".

Even a health and safety officer's competency during the incident was an: "issue of concern". The university has implemented a wide range of reviews to combat the problem and have put measures in place to stop this from happening again.

The incident involved the decommissioning of a 'RackBeta' machine that is used to measure radioactivity in samples such as muscle tissue by using Radium and was brought to York from Cambridge 14 years ago. It was identified for decommissioning after research using it had finished.

The report exposes how the senior lecturer charged with decommissioning not only failed to gain permission from the head of department, but also failed to consult the manufacturer's engineer and made no written risk assessment. Incredibly, the lecturer had performed this procedure twice before and should have been aware of the procedures involved. The botched process even saw the Radium from the machine FALL to the ground before being placed back into the machine.

The report reveals how the staff involved with the decommissioning of the radioactive source did not possess sufficient competency required, and that there was: "no requirement or need" for biology staff to undertake the task.

During this process the teacher thought that the Radium was held in a lead container which was removed - when actually it was held in a similar steel rod. During the decommissioning process the stainless steel tube became detached from both the lead chamber and the RackBeta machine.

The remains of the machine, including the Radium, were therefore inadvertently transferred. This mix up led to the Radium being taken, via a tractor, to a scrap metal merchant before being forwarded on to a recycling plant in Sheffield.

It transpired that the scrap merchants used weren't even on York's approved contractors list. In fact, Grounds Maintenance Employees had undertaken an unauthorised



Photo by Alex Papushoy

disposal of scrap metals from the University, using equipment not designed or even appropriate for carrying out the job. Plus no risk assessment for the removal of scrap metals was in place and no records or audit trail were provided to support the scrap metal.

Meanwhile the Health and Safety Advisor, who was directly involved in the decommissioning of the RackBeta machine, failed to follow the roles and responsibilities charged with his position. He even requested 'Wipe Tests', a completely pointless activity as it would not establish contamination of a sealed source of radiation. The report claims that his: "competency with regards to radiation protection raises issues of concern"

Another core factor was that the steel container, which held the Radium, wasn't painted or labelled

correctly - something that was present from when the machine was imported from Cambridge University. The lead chamber was painted a bright yellow colour and carried the international symbol denoting Radiation, but crucially the steel container was completely unmarked. The lecturer would therefore have struggled to know the danger of the steel container.

The report concludes that: "Academic and Technical employees within the Biology Department did not recognise or realise the hazards associated with their actions in decommissioning and dismantling the RackBeta machine. Hence no assessment of risk was undertaken, there was little or no attention paid to the health and safety of themselves and others."

The report also slams the com-

petence of the Health and Safety Advisor who helped dismantle the machine: "Despite the training provided to Staff Member C, his competency with regards to radiation protection raises issues of concern"

In response, the University has unveiled a raft of reviews and new regulations to make sure the incident is never repeated. In particular it promises that: "The University of York Health and Safety Guidance Note *The Use of Ionising Radiation at the University of York* is to be reviewed and revised to ensure that the decommissioning and dismantling of any equipment that uses or contains any form of a Radiation Source is, if authorised, controlled with the appropriate levels of supervision and monitoring arrangements in place."

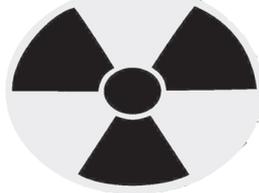
The Biology department in particular: "is to undertake a complete review of all risk assessments to ensure that they are suitable and sufficient." Plus it adds that they will "undertake a review of all training and competencies to ensure that all employees are suitably trained and qualified to perform and undertake their roles and responsibilities in accordance with their job descriptions."

They have also promised reform of disposal measures with, "suitable and sufficient risk assessments are to be undertaken."

Campus' most powerful boss, Keith Lilley, authorised the report that Vision obtained under the Freedom of Information act.

# THE RADIUM REPORT

# SCANDAL



BY EMILY HODGES

**PERILOUS BRIDGES** were forced to close after an external inspection deemed them unsafe to use.

Two campus bridges were barricaded up by the Estates Department "until further notice" to prioritise the safety of users.

It has been reported that the bridges, which connect Alcuin College to Langwith; and Goodricke College to Vanbrugh, have been at risk of collapsing for a while.

Diversion notices have been put up around the closed walkways to direct users to other routes, however they do not seem to have eased students' anger at the alterations.

Third year, Rachel Thompson, said: "It's ridiculous - campus is falling apart and the University refuses to do anything about it."

The Estates Department now plans to remove the bridges, but it is thought they will not be replaced.

The problem stems from "concern" with safe loading levels, and the fact that the bridges' "length of useful life cannot be guaranteed".

The University has apologised for the inconvenience, but says, "The priority has to be the safety of everyone using the campus".



**PERSON A**  
Senior lecturer responsible for decommissioning



**PERSON C**  
Health and Safety advisor - helped with decommission

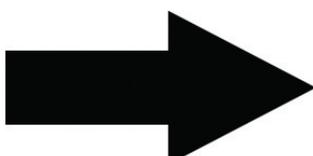


**PERSON S**  
Radioactive protection supervisor

## HOW THE ROD WAS LOST.



Senior biology lecturer, Person A, deconstructs radium machine without permission

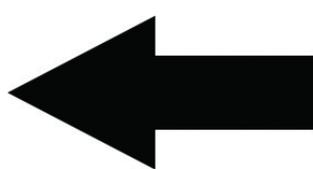


Cambridge University, from where the machine had been imported, had not marked the radium container correctly

There was a mix-up involving which steel container held the radium. Person C showed no "competency" decommissioning the 'Rack-Beta' machine



Grounds maintenance conducted "unauthorised disposal of scrap metals" in a tractor



Tractor drove the rod to a "waste transfer station" in York



BY LAUREN KELLY

**AN OBE AWARD** has been presented to former York University professor, Jim Walvin for his 'services to Scholarship' that have revolutionized perceptions of the slave trade.

Walvin, who retired from the University's History department three years ago, received the prize in the New Year's Honours List for his 45 years writing books on slavery and abolition.

The former professor said the most challenging project of his career had been, "establishing slavery as a major historical event. When I started at York, it was unknown territory; now, today, no one needs to be told about the impact of slavery."

Walvin has been praised as "one of the most prolific writers on the history of American slavery" and his impact on international scholarship has bolstered the University's reputation.

The extent of Walvin's research has required trips to exotic historical locations and for the last forty years he has made bi-annual journeys to the Caribbean to pursue research opportunities.

The award, which was established by King George V in 1917 during the First World War, recognizes distinguished services to the arts and sciences and public services outside the Civil service.

Other recipients of the Queen's distinguished prize this year include Kylie Minogue, George Alagiah and Des Lynam.