

Illegal excess lead in rifle range To be cleared by new vent system

by Neal Simon

An illegal and potentially dangerous amount of lead was found in the rifle range air-space this past August in a test conducted by the college chemistry department.

Two students, Matthew Smith and Jim Biegajski, working under the supervision of Dr. Joseph Bieron, found the lead content in the range air-space to be approximately four times greater than that considered safe by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Dr. Bieron explained the student's report:

"While firing was going on, the concentration of lead was higher than the recommended limit, and we recommended that prudent action be taken," he said.

That action has taken the form of a new ventilation system.

Construction of the system got underway during the first week of school and was completed roughly two weeks ago.

At this writing, the range has remained closed for other repairs, and no new lead test has been performed as yet. Reopening of the range is believed to be imminent.

Smith and Biegajski used an instrument called a millipore filter to test the range's air-space before, during and after shooting was done. They found .545 milligrams of lead per cubic meter of air in the range during and after the shooting. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recommends that no one be exposed to more than .45 milligrams of lead per cubic meter of air for any length of time.

Dr. Bieron believes the danger is minimal.

"Exposure to lead is not a new experience, and this amount wouldn't cause any acute health problems," he said. Dr. Bieron offered no opinion on long term health effects.

Monetary effects, on the other hand, have been substantial. Though exact figures have not been released, it is believed that the total cost of the ventilation system will be close to four thousand dollars. Total cost of range improvements could exceed \$6,000.

A small portion of the money, about five hundred dollars, will be taken from student services with the remainder to be raised from various alumni associations.

When operating, the rifle range is used by the rifle and pistol club, the college rifle team, campus public safety, and for ROTC rifle training.