

### **STAO/APSO Position Statement Regarding Laboratory Safety**

The techniques of Science teaching have changed from lectures and demonstrations to those involving a significant amount of "hands on" activities. This is reflected in the new curriculum which even mandates that certain experiments be carried out. As a result of these changes students may be exposed to even more risk than they were previously. All risk cannot be eliminated. However, it must be anticipated and minimized.

The Ministry of Education, local boards of education and parents have the right to expect that student investigations be carried out in the safest possible way, in the safest possible environment. Future employers of these students have the right to expect that they will leave school with a proper attitude towards safety that will carry over into the workplace.

Because of the expectations of the above groups, and the foundations laid by Science teachers in developing proper techniques and fostering realistic positive attitudes, teachers have moral and legal obligations towards students as they specifically relate to safety.

From a personal perspective, teachers have the same protection as other employees in the Province, as they are now protected by the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Various sections of this Act require that greater attention to safety be given by both teachers and their employers.

### **IT IS STAO/APSO'S POSITION REGARDING SAFETY IN SCIENCE EDUCATION THAT;**

because the local Board of Education has the ultimate responsibility for the health and safety in its jurisdiction, it must ensure that a safety program is established and maintained. A safe science program must be composed of the following inter-related elements:

**PEOPLE:** In order that Science may be taught safely, all persons in the local jurisdiction must have, or acquire a positive attitude about safety. These persons include the Board members, all employees of the Board, and the students themselves. They must become KNOWLEDGEABLE in areas of safety that affect their daily activities. Teachers must be role models and become examples of persons who are COMMITTED to safety.

**PLACES:** The facilities must comply with all existing legislation and must provide as safe a working environment as possible.

**PRACTICES:** Science is an experimental subject and must continue to be taught with the "hands on" approach. The techniques and procedures that expose students to various degrees of risk need not be eliminated, but modified so that they are carried out safely. Local Boards of Education must establish the criteria of a "safe environment" in the form of a written safety policy, and must ensure that there is compliance with it. The Boards must also provide mechanisms for the training and updating of its employees relating to safety.

The individual, knowledgeable and committed teacher can do a great deal to further the students' awareness about safety. However, the teacher cannot work alone on this task, and must be given support by local and provincial officials. Only when all work together will a significant increase in safety attitudes be achieved.