

UP IN SMOKE

Mishap prompts Bank of Canada to stop incinerating old money

By Ian Austen
Southam News

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The Bank of Canada has given up incinerating old money and confidential documents after a plume of black smoke drove Ottawa workers from their offices in May.

Documents obtained by Southam News under access to information legislation reveal the bank was burning confidential computer tapes at its downtown headquarters on May 9 when smoke began pouring from the building.

The noxious-smelling smoke was quickly sucked in through the fresh air intakes of neighboring office buildings, setting off fire alarms and sending many people into the streets.

Guy Theriault, the bank's deputy secretary, said in an interview Wednesday the smoke was the result of "human error" that led to a larger than usual amount of computer tape being burned.

The bank's incinerator — which was mainly used to burn worn-out money — has since been shut down and will remain closed.

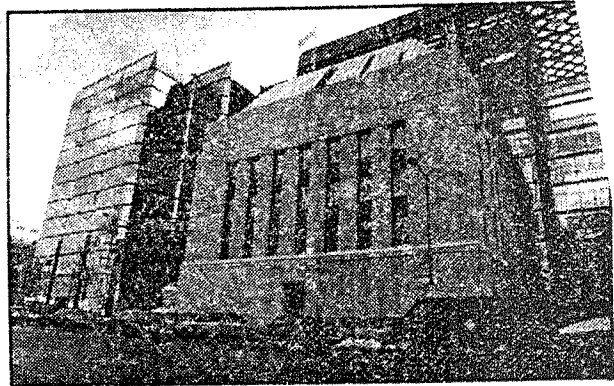
While the May 9 incident hurried the decision, Theriault said studies by the bank show that other methods of destroying money are cheaper than burning.

Money that is too worn or damaged for recirculation will be shredded and taken to dumps.

No final decision has been made about computer tapes. The bank will either destroy them in-house or send them for destruction to a private-sector firm.

The documents released by the bank reveal new money is causing the bank problems as well.

Workers have complained of eye irritation, particularly in the morning, while working in a vault that stores sheets of newly-printed bills before they are



— Citizen photo

Bank of Canada: Workers fled offices

cut into bank notes.

An investigation by Labor Canada pinned the problem on formaldehyde gas given off by the special paper used to print money. The gas built up at night when the newly-printed money was sealed in the vault.

Long the favorite preservative of undertakers, formaldehyde can irritate the lungs and eyes. The chemical is also suspected of causing cancer.

The bank has a filtering system intended to remove the gas, but the Labor Canada study recommended finding a way to bring fresh air to the bank notes at night.

Theriault said to do that would be "very difficult, if not impossible given the very nature of vault construction." While the bank intends to design future vaults with fresh air supplies, Theriault said the best that can be done with the current money chamber is to expand its filtering system.

Money-hungry can rest easy

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Government finds lethal dose of \$50 bills would cost \$9.6M

By Ian Austen
Southam News

It cost taxpayers at least \$30,000, but the Bank of Canada now knows that its new \$50 bill would only be toxic to very wealthy gluttons.

It's not the actual bill that's the problem. It's the small, anti-forgery squares that could poison would-be money eaters.

A safety report for the Bank of Canada calculates that a chemical in the squares would prove fatal to a 70-kilogram person who ate

193,103 of the bills — roughly \$9.6 million.

But bank deputy secretary Guy Theriault noted wryly: "I think you would have to worry about dying from indigestion first."

The study — which cost between \$30,000 and \$35,000 — was given to Southam News through an Access to Information request.

The central bank commissioned the report to confirm that the new anti-forgery gadget posed no threat either to its employees who make and glue them on to \$50

bills or the general public.

The squares are made largely from zirconium oxide, a white powder also used to make enamels and ceramic tiles. The report says it has about the same toxicity as baking soda.

The squares first appeared on a new series of \$50 bills last year and soon will be attached to \$100 notes.

The bank hopes to eventually put the devices on \$20 bills — bringing the price of a lethal dose to a mere \$3.7 million.