

# News Release



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## **Culture shock will highlight penicillin discovery**

The Royal Society of Chemistry is seeking retch-inducing neglected workplace coffee cups to mark a milestone in scientific discovery. The Society is looking for the UK's most spectacular accidental growth of green gunge to be found in a discarded cup of coffee in a British workplace.

The nastiest culture in the UK is sought to mark the British discovery of penicillin 75 years ago tomorrow (Wednesday 3 September). Any colour of growth is allowable. The organisation is inviting staff in UK workplaces to send in photographs of the surface of discarded cups of coffee. The Society stresses that cups must not be sent in and only images of cups will qualify.

The culture on the top of leftover coffee must be clearly discernable and the competition's early closing date (see below) will prevent people growing their own cultures intentionally in order to win the prize which will be awarded to the sender of the picture, not the person who discarded the cup. The prize in the competition, results to be announced during national Chemistry Week in November, will be an evening of culture at a location near to the winner's place of residence.

Sir Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin at St Mary's Hospital, London, on 3 September 1928 after leaving a dish out in his laboratory for a lengthy period of time. The culture that had grown on its surface - during his summer holiday - opened the way to the development of a medicine which would relieve suffering during the Second World War and go on later to help hundreds of millions of people around the globe.

"The culture that developed on Fleming's laboratory dish has much in common with those ageing, ownerless coffee cups languishing on shelves and workstations in British offices and in factories," said RSC spokesman James McNish. "Mould spores float through the air and are always on the lookout for a favourite place to grow. This competition is a way of illustrating the point that science sometimes involves some luck and happenstance. We do not recommend that people leave filthy coffee cups near their computers for weeks or even near lab equipment. Safety and cleanliness is generally the far better route to good results. The penicillin story is a rare example of progress through messiness."

Photographic entries to: [emsleyb@rsc.org](mailto:emsleyb@rsc.org) or to Culture Shock, Royal Society of Chemistry, Burlington House, London W1J 0BA. Closing date 10 September 2003.

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The Royal Society of Chemistry is the Professional Body and Learned Society for chemistry in the UK with 46,000 members world-wide. It is a major international publisher of chemical information, supports the teaching of chemistry at all levels and is a leader in bringing science to the public.

All of the Society's news releases and other press information can be found at the on-line press office at [www.rsc.org](http://www.rsc.org)