

Discarded medicine threatens water

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

Don't flush that unused penicillin.

The improper disposal of medications is a threat to York Region's drinking water and ought to be addressed with a recovery program, the solid waste committee was told Wednesday.

Rod Muir, founder of a company called Green Ideas, is seeking funding from York and other GTA regions to set up a program to collect and dispose of medicines.

"There are meds in the water system and the problem is disposal," Mr. Muir said. "They're flushing them down the toilet or in the sink or they're putting it in landfill."

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Mr. Muir proposes a system that would return unused meds to the pharmacy from which they were dispensed, where they would be destroyed.

"The proper disposal of medicines is through incineration," he said.

He asked York Region for \$7,000, "a penny a person", to launch the recovery program.

The committee has asked for a report on the issue.

Regional works commissioner Kees Schipper said while contamination by used medication has not been identified as problem in York, it is worthy of investigation.

"It's been seen in Lake Ontario water more than Lake Simcoe water," Mr. Schipper said.

"A number of regions have identified it as a problem. It is an ongoing concern and it is being looked at seriously."

Solid waste director Andy Campbell said the region does accept pharmaceuticals, as do many drug stores.

Several drums of used medication were collected at the region's hazardous waste depots in Markham and East Gwillimbury, he said.

Mr. Campbell said the region could likely do more to increase awareness of the hazardous waste depots as a potential disposal site for meds. Pharmacists could do the same, he said.

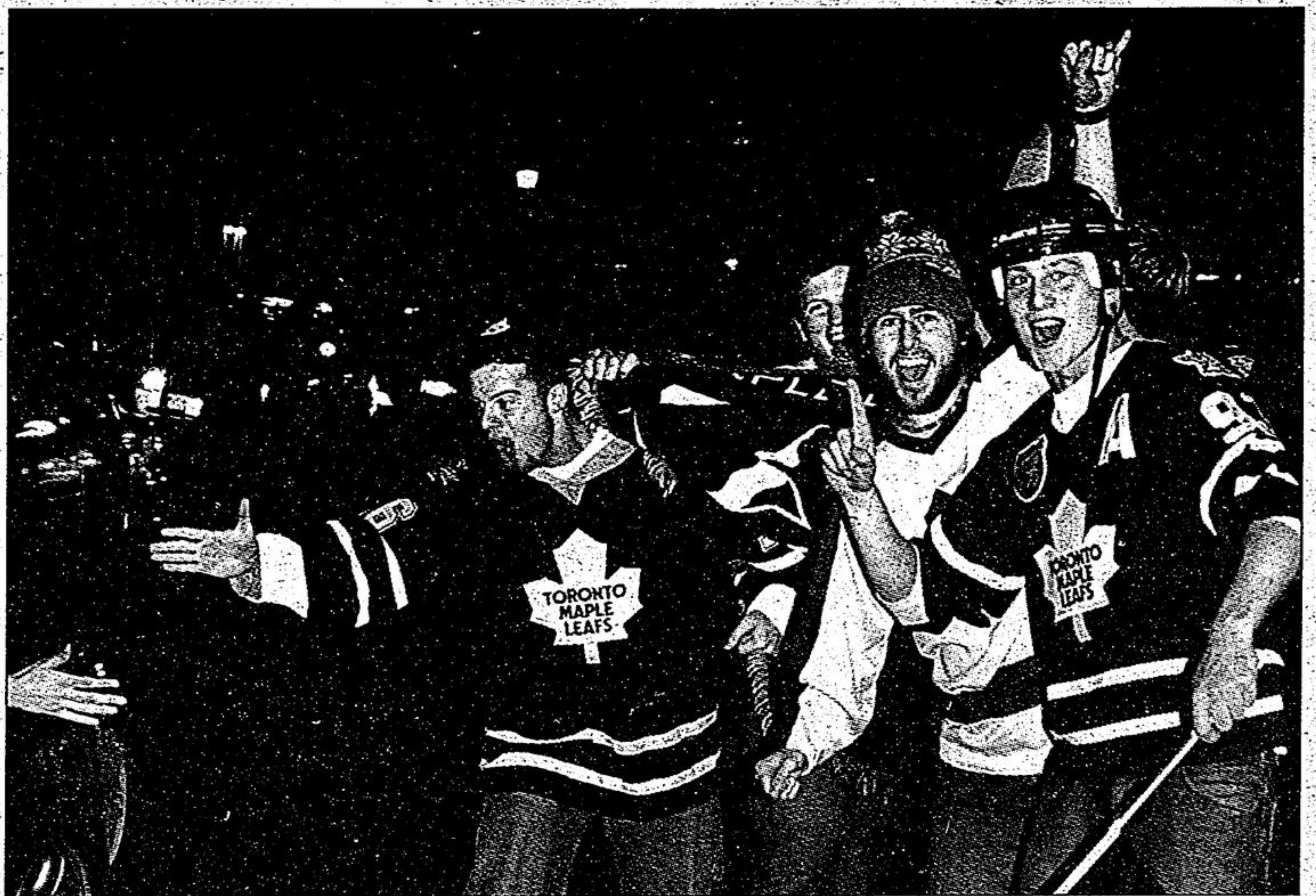
"I think the issue is promotion and education about the opportunity the consumer has to get rid of (medications)," he said.

Janet Becigneul, media relations manager with the Canadian Pharmacists Association, said the industry regards safe disposal of drugs as a responsibility.

"Most pharmacies do engage in those kind of programs as a service to their patients," she said.

"Ask your pharmacist; if they're not doing it, ask them if they can."

LEAF FANS TAKE IT TO THE STREETS



PHOTO/DAVID KATES

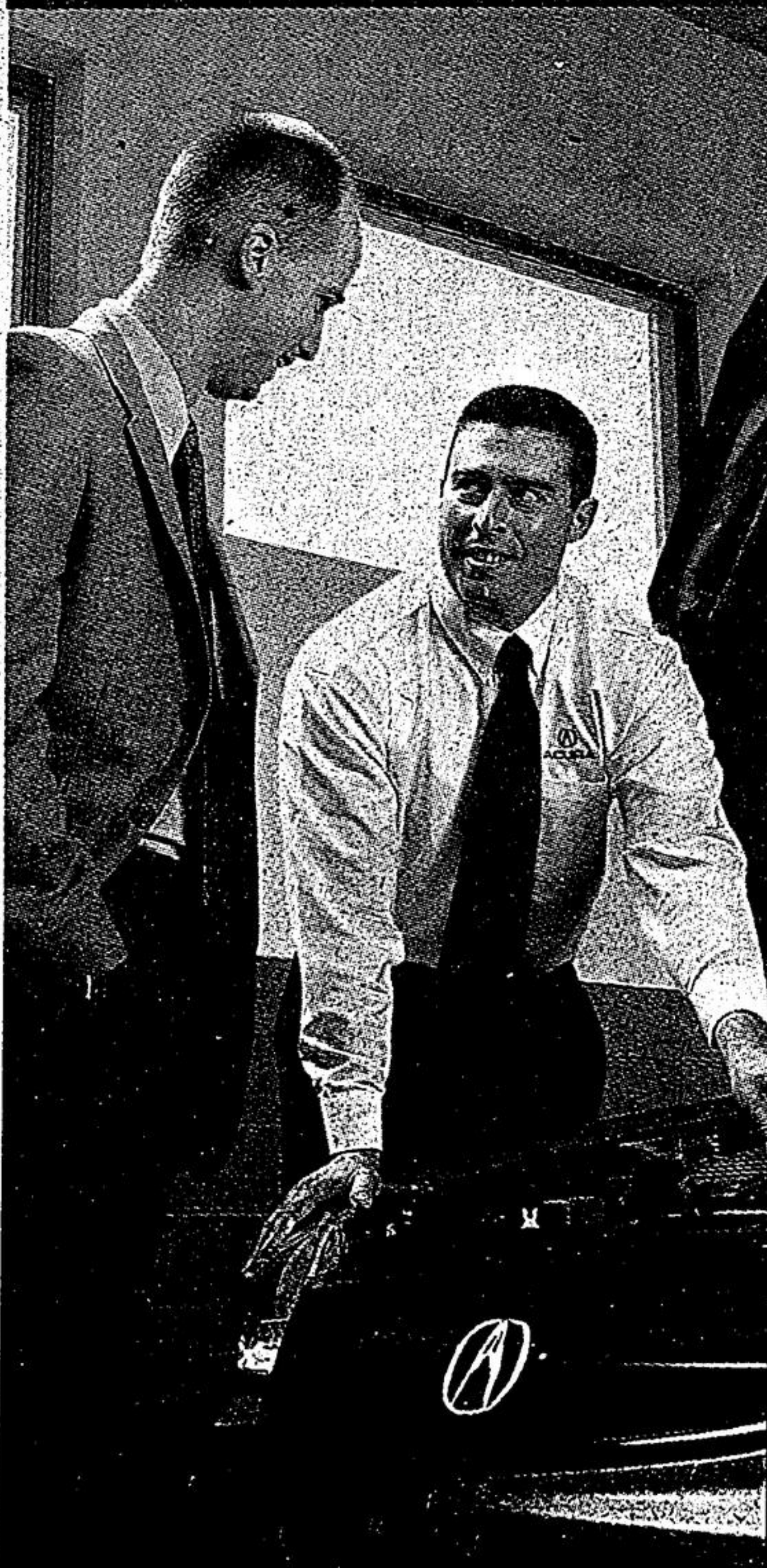
Toronto Maple Leaf fans had reason to celebrate Tuesday night in Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville including (above) on Main Street in Unionville. Their favourite team eliminated the Ottawa Senators with a 3-0 win at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto. The Leafs open their Stanley Cup semi-final series tonight with the Carolina Hurricanes. Game time is 7 p.m. on CBC-TV.

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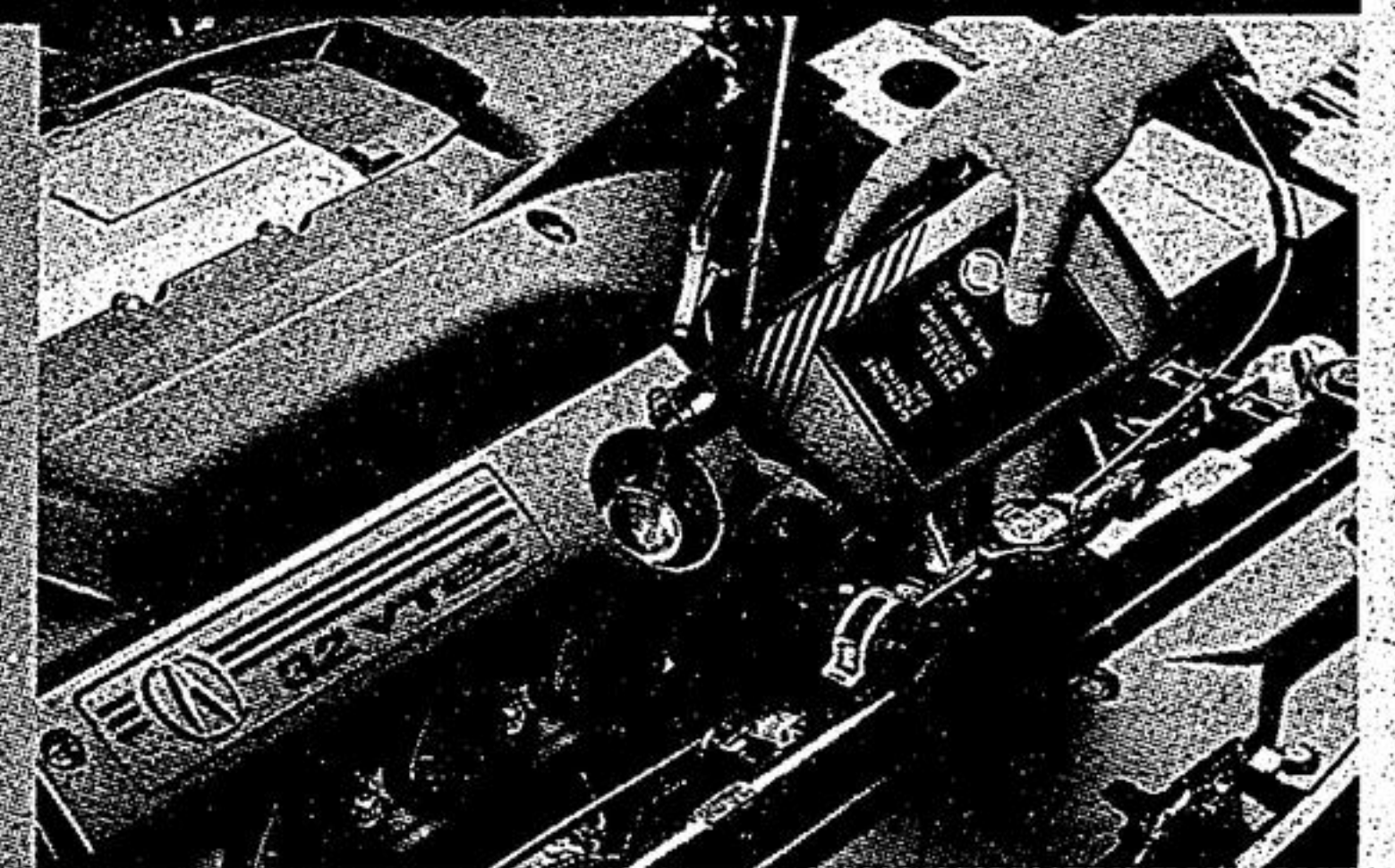
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