

# College sues for damages, saying cleaner turned off lab freezer and destroyed research

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More than 20 years of cell cultures and other specimens stored at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute were destroyed when a cleaner switched off power to a lab freezer, according to a lawsuit filed by the school.

RPI is seeking \$1 million from Daigle Cleaning Systems, claiming one

of the company's employees turned off the circuit breaker for the [freezer](#), which must keep [specimens](#) at minus 112 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 80 degrees Celsius), according to the lawsuit filed this month.

The freezer was used by researchers studying how plants use photosynthesis to create energy. A notice had been placed on the unit's door reading in part, "THIS FREEZER IS BEEPING AS IT IS UNDER REPAIR. PLEASE DO NOT MOVE OR UNPLUG IT," shortly before the cleaner came into the lab on Sept. 17, 2020.

The cleaner heard the "annoying" alarm that evening and tried to help by turning the circuit breakers on. But the cleaner actually moved the breakers from the "on" to "off" position. The temperature inside the freezer rose to minus 26 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 32 degrees Celsius), the lawsuit said.

Graduate researchers discovered the freezer was off the next day and tried to mitigate the damage, but "a majority of specimens were compromised, destroyed and rendered unsalvageable," demolishing more than 20 years of research, according to the complaint.

A call seeking comment was made to the cleaning company.

The [suit](#) was [first reported](#) by the Times Union of Albany.

The filing said the cleaner is a person with "special needs." An [attorney](#) representing RPI, Michael Ginsberg, said he couldn't elaborate. The [lawsuit](#) alleges the company is at fault for failing to properly train and supervise their employee.

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