

University of Toronto

GUIDELINE ON THE USE OF PERFUMES AND SCENTED PRODUCTS

Purpose

The University of Toronto is committed to a safe and healthy environment for faculty, staff, students, and visitors. This guideline is intended to:

- 1) Increase the awareness within the University community about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected.
- 2) Ask for the voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment.
- 3) Provide the steps for responding to scent-related issues.

What is the issue?

Exposure to perfumes and other scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities.

Fragrances are found in a wide range of products. Common scented products include perfume, cologne, aftershave, deodorant, soap, shampoo, hairspray, bodyspray, makeup and powders. Examples of other products with added scents include air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, carpet deodorizers, facial tissues, and candles.

We generally think that it is a personal choice to use fragrances; however, fragrance chemicals are by their very nature shared. The chemicals vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled by those around us. Today's scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

Some of these fragrance chemicals are known to be skin sensitizers. Some are also respiratory tract irritants, and can trigger asthma and breathing difficulties. Asthmatics commonly cite fragrances as initiating or exacerbating their asthma. Fragrances are also implicated in vascular changes that can trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. Individuals with chemical sensitivities can experience symptoms at very low levels in the air, far below those known to cause harmful effects in the general population.

Susceptible individuals can experience a variety of symptoms, including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate. Although the mechanisms by which fragrance chemicals act to produce symptoms are not yet understood, the impact on all those affected can be quite severe, resulting in great difficulty in work and study activities.

Increasing Awareness

This guideline is intended to raise the awareness within the University community about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected. Information on scent awareness will be disseminated through posters, web sites, information brochures and training sessions where appropriate.

Working Towards A Scent-Reduced Environment

In order to protect those individuals with fragrance sensitivities and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities, the University is asking for voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment. Faculty, staff, students and visitors are strongly encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of fragranced products, and to replace them with

unscented alternatives. This is a request to voluntarily refrain from chemical-based scented products, and not a ban on scented products.

What is the University doing about it?

Recognizing that chemicals, including fragrance chemicals, can negatively impact on indoor air quality, the University will strive to:

- ◆ Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including fragrance chemicals.
- ◆ Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products in laboratories, cleaning materials, and building materials.
- ◆ Target harmful chemicals and contaminants and implement controls to effectively prevent or minimize their release into the general air as a result of building, maintenance, custodial, research and teaching activities.
- ◆ Support the best possible air quality practicably attainable, by means of proper ventilation, peak performance and proper maintenance of building mechanical ventilation systems.
- ◆ Develop proper information and training to promote the above to the University community.

What can you do to help?

- ◆ Be considerate of those who are sensitive to fragrance chemicals. Avoid using scented products; instead, use scent-free alternatives.
- ◆ If you do use scented products, use them sparingly. A general guideline for scented products is that the scent should not be detectable more than an arm's length away from you. Do not apply scented products in a public area.

- ◆ Avoid using products (e.g. air fresheners or potpourris) that give off chemical-based scents in your work area.
- ◆ Avoid using laundry products or cleaning agents that are scented. Air out drycleaned clothing before wearing.

What can you do if you are sensitive to fragrance chemicals?

- ◆ If you feel you can do so comfortably, approach the scented individual and let him/her know how you react to fragrances. Be specific about the types of physical reactions you have (e.g. asthma attacks, migraines, shortness of breath). Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for their understanding and cooperation. Many people are unaware of the potential health effects of fragrance chemicals.
- ◆ Inform your supervisor or instructor of your sensitivities, your symptoms, and the types of exposures that improve or worsen these symptoms. Ask them to assist in finding a solution to your situation. As an employee, you may ask your supervisor to discuss this matter with the individual involved or with the group of employees. As a student, you can ask your professor to discuss the issue with the class and ask for their cooperation in not using scented products.
- ◆ Consult with your physician about your symptoms.
- ◆ Consult the resources listed in this guideline for further information or assistance.

What can you do as a Supervisor?

If an individual in your work area or classroom is adversely affected by scented products:

- ◆ Listen to the person with respect and civility.

What can you do as a Supervisor (cont'd)?

- ◆ Clarify the issue. Ask the individual to describe their health effects, the factors that make the problem better or worse, and the actions they are taking to deal with it.
- ◆ Investigate the issue and use good judgment and consideration to provide a fair, uniform and timely resolution.
- ◆ Discuss the issue with your staff or students in an open and non-threatening manner. Inform them of the health concerns that have arisen as a result of the use of scented products in the workplace. You may choose to have this discussion with an individual or an entire group, whichever is appropriate to the situation.
- ◆ Request everyone's cooperation and understanding to voluntarily avoid the use of scented products in the area. Discuss the benefits of a scent-free work area.
- ◆ Implement measures to reasonably accommodate those who are affected by scented products. Where employees are severely limited due to exposure to scented products, you may need to establish a fragrance-free zone. For meetings held in enclosed rooms, you may need to send out notices to attendees informing them of the scent-free nature of the meeting.
- ◆ Consult campus accessibility resources to accommodate students during classes or exam time.
- ◆ Consult with the building engineer regarding the adequacy of ventilation in the area.
- ◆ Promote the information in this guideline and display the "We Share the Air" poster.
- ◆ Refer those issues which cannot be resolved locally to the Department Head, Accessibility Services, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety, the local

joint health and safety committee and/or Human Resources, as appropriate.

What should you do if you're approached about the scented product you're wearing?

- ◆ If an individual or your supervisor informs you that the fragranced products that you use or wear are a problem and requests that you avoid using them, you may feel puzzled, hurt, annoyed, defensive or even insulted by the request. Understand that it is not about you as a person or about your choice of fragrance, but it is about the chemicals in the fragranced product. Do not discount the issue as ridiculous and unreasonable.
- ◆ Discuss the issue openly. Ask questions about the health impact on the person, the types of symptoms experienced, the factors which make the person's symptoms better or worse (e.g. fragrance type, amount used).
- ◆ Empathize with the individual. Work with cooperation and understanding towards a satisfactory resolution.

University Resources - Employees

Office of Environmental Health and Safety
215 Huron Street, 7th Floor
Tel. (416) 978-4467

Health and Well-Being Programs and Services
263 McCaul Street, 2nd Floor
Tel. (416) 978-2149

University Resources - Students

St. George Campus
Accessibility Services
Robarts Library, 130 St. George Street, 1st Floor
Tel. (416) 978-8060, TDD (416) 978-1902

U of T at Mississauga
AccessAbility Resource Centre
Room 1113, South Building
Tel/TTY (905) 569-4699

U of T at Scarborough
AccessAbility Services
Room S302, 1265 Military Trail
Tel/TTY (416) 287-7560

Health Services (for Students)
214 College Street
Tel. (416) 978-8030

Other Resources

Ontario Lung Association
Tel. (416) 922-9440
www.on.lung.ca

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INFORMATION BROCHURE



Use Good Sense
With Scents!



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Office of Environmental Health and Safety
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