

	TITLE: Scent Sensitivity Procedure
	SPONSOR: Vice-President, Finance & Administration
	ACCOUNTABILITY: Office of Accountability: Safety and Risk Management Administrative Accountability: Director, Safety and Risk Management
PREVIOUS VERSIONS: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	

1. Purpose:

The Scent Sensitivity Procedure has been designed to address health concerns arising from exposure to scented products and deliver a means to:

- Provide a heightened awareness of the increasing issue of workplace sensitivities
- Communicate the potential symptoms and effects of chemical and fragrance sensitivities
- Respect the fact that people have varying health susceptibilities and may develop scent sensitivities during their lives
- Encourage the OCAD U Community to refrain from using scented products whenever possible.

This procedure is not a “ban” on the use of scented products, but a request to voluntarily refrain from the use of chemical-based scented products in order to minimize the risk of adverse health reactions.

2. Scope:

This procedure voluntarily applies to all members of the OCAD U community including employees, students, volunteers, visitors, and contractors.

It is not the intent of these guidelines to impose mandatory obligations in regards to refraining from scented products on members of the OCAD U community.

3. Definitions:

Scents - Usually mean the smells or odours from cosmetics (perfume, make-up, shampoo, deodorant, etc) or from other products such as air fresheners, cleaners, etc.

Allergy - Condition in which exposure to material prompts the body's immune system to react. It may cause respiratory, skin, or mucus membrane symptoms from mild to very severe. Symptoms can be relieved by taking an anti-histamine medication.

Sensitivity - Condition in which exposure causes similar reactions as an allergy but there is no medication to relieve the symptoms - the only "treatment" is to avoid exposure.

4. Procedure:

4.1 If you are an **employee experiencing adverse health effects due to exposure to scented products**

- a) If it is clearly identified that the source of your symptoms can be isolated to a particular scent or individual, approach the individual wearing the scented product in a positive manner and share your concerns about the scented product being used in your area. Express how the use of the scented product is causing discomfort and affecting your health. If an environment of co-operation and understanding is created between you and your co-worker, your concern will most likely be resolved.
- b) If the scent problem is more generalized and/or the source is unidentifiable or you are unable to resolve your concerns with your co-worker or you do not feel comfortable approaching the individual, approach your supervisor with your concern.
- c) If your reaction to scented products in the workplace is sufficiently severe that you are disabled from performing your normal work, such that you seek outside health care and/or lose time from work:
 - Report outside health care to your supervisor as a workplace illness/injury.
 - Obtain medical documentation from a health care practitioner and follow his/her recommendations to address your health issues (e.g. seeking further medical attention, taking any required medication) and provide copy of documentation to your supervisor.
- d) If your ongoing reaction to scented products is sufficiently severe that you are unable to perform the essential duties of your job and are requesting alternate accommodation, please contact Human Resources per the University's accommodation policy – Accommodation in Employment for Persons with Disabilities. In completing the medical information form, you will be requested to obtain medical documentation from a medical specialist (e.g. allergist, environmental health specialist) that:
 - Confirms that your conditions/symptoms are related to exposure to scented products
 - Outlines the severity of the health risk, your restrictions and the type(s) of accommodations needed.

4.2 If you are an **employee who is approached about the use of your scent product:**

- a) Be aware that exposure to scented products can cause symptoms in certain individuals.
- b) Even if surprised and/or taken aback when approached, listen to co-worker in a non-defensive way.
- c) Learn as much as possible about the types of scented products that cause your co-worker to experience symptoms.
- d) Be understanding of the concern and willing to reach a resolution in a co-operative manner.

4.3 If you are a **supervisor** of an employee with scented product-related concerns:

- a) Thoroughly document the employee's concerns. Do not ignore the concern.

- b) If it is felt that there may be a general indoor air quality concern or deficiencies in the operation of the ventilation system, arrange for an assessment by Facilities Planning & Management staff and then, if necessary, by Safety & Risk Management.

- c) If the concern relates directly to scented product usage:
 - Communicate in private with the individual wearing the fragrance of the specific concerns with respect to the use of scented products raised in a work area. Communication should respect the individual's right to confidentiality.
 - Advise them that individuals can be adversely affected by exposure to scented products.
 - Request reduction of scented product usage.
 - Provide information on the nature of the scented product-related concerns to the Office of Safety & Risk Management.

- d) If the subsequent reduction in scented product usage is insufficient to address the employee's concern and a request for further accommodation is made, please work with Human Resources and the employee as per the University's accommodation policy – Accommodation in Employment for Persons with Disabilities – to determine appropriate accommodation.

- f) The nature and extent of accommodation is based on the severity of the health risk as identified through medical documentation. Accommodations, depending on severity, **may** include:
 - one-on-one communication, as needed in response to specific concerns, between supervisors and co-workers of the employee and/or members of the public who enter the work area, in which the supervisor advises of the concern and requests scented products not be used,
 - scented product information sessions for employees in the work area
 - communication with management of other staff in multi-tenanted facilities, requesting that their staff be asked to refrain from wearing scented products in common areas such as washrooms and elevators and to reduce scented product usage overall
 - provision of information to employees in the work area on alternatives to chemically scented products
 - requesting advance communication of work operations such as floor waxing, carpet shampooing, or painting and posting notices and MSDS Sheets when such operations

are to be performed, and make alternate arrangements to accommodate during these work activities (e.g. relocate employee to another area)

- relocation of employees who require accommodation away from high traffic areas where scented product usage is likely to be more prevalent

Related Documents

- a) Information Bulletin (Appendix 1)
- b) Sample Notices (Appendix 2)



Appendix 1 Information Bulletin



1. What is meant by “scent free”, “fragrance-free” or “unscented”?

Although there is no universal agreement on the exact definition of "scent free", scents usually refer to the smells or odours from cosmetics (perfume, make-up, shampoo, deodorant, etc.) or from other products such as air fresheners, cleaners, etc.

A product labelled "scent-free" could mean that no scent has been added to the chemicals already used to make it. It is important to remember some products which claim to be 'scent free' may have only masked the scent by use of an additional chemical. So it is important to read the product label carefully; if the word "fragrance" or "flavour" is in the list of ingredients, it is NOT fragrance free".

In some cases, odours in a product are masked by adding other chemicals e.g. “lemon scented”, “vanilla scented etc.

2. What are fragrances?

People have been using perfumes for hundreds of years; however fragrance sensitivity is a relatively new phenomenon. Before the 20th century, fragrances were extracted directly from plants and animals. Today more than 80 to 90 per cent of fragrance materials are synthetic compounds derived from various petrochemicals.

Fragrances are generally complex mixtures of chemicals formulated to have a specific or pleasant odour. The intensity of odour and how long it lasts is not necessarily associated with the level of fragrance in the product. The fragrance portion of a product may vary from less than one per cent to 25 to 30 per cent of the product.

Formulations changed in the 1980s, with the development of very strong synthetics that can be used at higher levels. In modern fragrance formulations, three to five materials may make up to 80 per cent of the formula. These mixtures are powerful and tenacious when sprayed or applied.

Fragrance chemicals are *volatile* by nature meaning they disperse into the air quickly and linger for a long time. The result is a complex mixture of chemicals that is constantly changing as it comes into contact with other substances. In indoor environments where air exchange is poor, the problems are increased.

3. Type of products containing scents

Scents are included in a very large range of products including:

- shampoo and conditioners
- hairsprays
- deodorants
- colognes & aftershaves
- fragrances & perfumes
- lotions & creams
- potpourri
- industrial and household chemicals
- soaps
- cosmetics
- air fresheners & deodorizers
- oils
- candles
- diapers
- some types of garbage bags

4. What are the routes of transmission?

Fragrance can enter the body through numerous routes such as:

- Skin absorption:
Most cosmetics containing fragrance are directly applied to the skin, as are perfumes and colognes, which eventually enter the bloodstream.

Fragrances have long been recognized as skin allergens and irritants. In the workplace fragrances can be found in soaps, cleaners, and other products, which can cause skin problems such as dermatitis in fragrance sensitive workers. A conservative estimate indicates that one to two per cent of the general population has a skin allergy to fragrance.

- Inhalation:
The purpose of fragrance in a product is to impart odour to it. To be detected, odour materials must disperse into the air. From the air the chemicals are inhaled into the airways and lungs and enter the blood stream. Once in the bloodstream they are distributed to other organs.

In general, fragranced products are recognized as respiratory irritants. Fragrances can induce or worsen respiratory problems such as asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, and allergies because of their irritant effect.

- Ingestion:
Ingestion is another route of exposure because many of the same materials are used as flavours in foods (e.g. lemon or strawberry-flavoured candy)
- Olfactory (sense of smell) pathways.
Fragrances also go directly to the brain and the nervous system via the olfactory pathways.

5. Can scents cause health problems?

When scented products have been blamed for adversely affecting a person's health, some or all of the following symptoms are reported:

- headaches
- dizziness
- light-headedness
- nausea
- fatigue
- weakness
- insomnia
- malaise
- confusion
- loss of appetite
- depression
- anxiety
- numbness
- upper respiratory symptoms
- shortness of breath
- difficulty with concentration
- skin irritation

Allergic and asthmatic patients report that certain odours, even in the smallest amounts, can trigger an attack. In addition, those persons with "multiple chemical sensitivity" may also be affected.

6. What is the difference between an allergy and sensitivity?

An allergy is a condition in which exposure to material prompts the body's immune system to react. It may cause respiratory, skin, or mucus membrane symptoms from mild to very severe. Symptoms can be relieved by taking an anti-histamine medication.

Sensitivities to things such as scented products can cause the same type and severity of symptoms. There is no medication to relieve the symptoms - the only "treatment" is to avoid exposure.

7. Are there any labelling requirements for products or cosmetics?

As most products containing fragrances are considered "consumer products" they are excluded from the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and its provisions. This makes it difficult for individuals to pinpoint the specific chemicals that may be problematic to them and to determine their potential health effects.

Consumer labels focus on immediate hazards such as corrosion (burns to skin/eyes), explosion, fire and poison. Only certain ingredients will be listed on the package or product. To find out all of the ingredients in the product, it may be necessary to contact the manufacturer directly.

8. What can you do to help?

You can adopt **scent-free practices** by avoiding using perfumes, aftershaves, colognes, and scented lotions and opting for "fragrance-free", "scent-free", or "unscented" versions of such personal care products as hand and body lotions, soaps, hair products, deodorants, and laundry and home cleaning products.

9. What is a Scent-Circle

You may have heard that it is fine to wear scents as long as they remain within your "scent-circle" (within an arm's length of you).

The "scent-circle" is an idea which sounds good but does not work very well in the real world. Have you ever stepped into an empty elevator, a hallway or room and been able to tell that the person before you had been wearing perfume or cologne?

As molecules of fragrance chemicals evaporate from your skin, they do not stay within an arm's distance of you. Instead they are picked up by currents of air that constantly move around us, and the fragrances are dispersed into the atmosphere we all breathe. Fragrances are volatile organic compounds and it's their nature to waft in the air. Even if you sat very still in one place, you could not keep a circle of air containing the fragrance close around you.

As well, many environments such as the office, theatre or workplace do not allow us to keep an arm's length from others.

10. Did you know?

- one of the very best air freshener/cleaners is baking soda
- one of the best household cleaners is white vinegar

11. Additional Resources:

- http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html
- http://www.on.lung.ca/yourlungs/asthma_triggers.html
- <http://www.lung.ca/cando/workplace.html>



Appendix 2

Sample Notices



SCENT SENSITIVITY

Some members of our community report sensitivities to various chemical-based or scented products.

Scented products such as hair spray, perfume, and deodorant can trigger reactions such as respiratory distress and headaches.

Staff, Students, and Visitors are asked not to use these products when reporting to this building.

Thank you for your co-operation.



SCENT SENSITIVITY

Scented products can aggravate health problems for people with respiratory illness.

Your cooperation in avoiding the use of perfume, scented hairspray, cologne, scented deodorant, aftershave or other scented products would be appreciated.



SCENT SENSITIVITY

This is a No-Scent Building

