

## University Students' Council of the University of Western Ontario Scent Free Guideline

Effective: April 2009

Supercedes: None

### Purpose

With this guideline, our intention is to increase awareness of the USC community around the need to eliminate the use of scented products wherever possible as well as providing best practices for the management of scent related complaints and concerns, because of the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health and well being, productivity and lifestyle of those affected. The USC is committed to a safe and healthy environment for staff, students, visitors and the larger community.

### What is the issue?

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

Individuals with these pre-existing conditions when exposed to some odours can cause a range of ill health effects. Some reported symptoms include: headache, dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, fatigue, weakness, insomnia, confusion, loss of appetite, depression, anxiety, numbness, upper respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, difficulty concentrating and/or skin irritation. 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 activities.

We generally think that it is a personal choice to use fragrances; however, fragrance is 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.

### What are scented products?

Scented products fall into three main categories:

**Personal Products:** Under the Food and Drug Act, Cosmetics are defined as “any substance or mixture of substances manufactured, sold or represented for use in cleaning, improving or altering the complexion, skin, hair or teeth, and include deodorants, perfumes and colognes.

**Non-Personal Products:** Scented household and industrial cleaning products, air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, facial tissues, etc.

**Products brought into the University Community Centre:** Second hand smoke, engine exhausts, pollen, etc.

## **Why does the USC NOT have a scent/scent-reduced policy?**

Introducing a scent policy or a voluntary scent ban into a workplace is an important decision that affects the rights and responsibilities of all; employees, students and visitors. It is also a complex decision with many implications.

## **What are the alternatives to a scent/scent-reduced policy?**

**Be Specific.** Some people wear very strong scents and some wear too much. Any strong aroma-perfume or otherwise can be unpleasant and cause a short-term reaction. Rather than ask all employees to eliminate all scented products, try to identify only those individuals whose use scents may be inappropriate and ask them to modify their use.

**Stay inside your “scent circle”.** Everyone has a personal “scent circle” about an arm’s length away from their body. Ask that employees modify their use of scent so that no one outside their “scent circle” is aware of it.

**Maintain good indoor air quality.** If indoor air quality in a workplace is poor, many substances will linger and accumulate contributing to a stale air environment. Ensuring good ventilation and fresh air intake will contribute to all employees being more alert and energetic.

## **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. Use the “scent circle” test when applying scented products so that no one outside an arm’s length away from your body is aware of it. Do not apply scented products in a public area.

Avoid using products (e.g. air fresheners, potpourris) that give off chemical-based scents in your work area.

Avoid using laundry products or cleaning products that are scented. Air out dry cleaned clothes 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 discretely and explain (**Education is the key**) how scents affect your health. Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for his/her cooperation and understanding.

Inform your supervisor of your health issues, sensitivities, symptoms and type of exposure that improve or worsen these symptoms. As an employee, you may ask your supervisor to discuss this matter with the individual involved or the group of employees.

Consult with your physician.

Consult the resources listed in this guideline for further information or assistance.

### **What if I am approached about a scented product I am wearing?**

Do not take offense – this request is about the impact of chemicals on people, **NOT ABOUT YOU**.

Listen to your co-worker and ask questions. Find out whether your co-worker is more concerned about the type of product or the amount your wear. Discuss the issue openly.

When discussing the issue, please remember that **EDUCATION IS THE KEY**.

Be willing to reach a resolution in a cooperative manner. Consider an alternative product.

### **What can I do as a Supervisor?**

Managers and Supervisors should listen to and be sensitive to employee's concerns related to scented products. Be aware that some concerns may be indicators of other air quality problems. Others may relate primarily to minor discomfort and if so, education, awareness, and co-operation by all employees will likely resolve the issue.

Common sense is often the best guide when a concern about a scent in the workplace is raised.

Remember that the perfect solution may not be possible or even practical. Also remember that, for workers who are experiencing serious adverse reactions due to a medical condition or disability, a more specific response and accommodation may be required.

### **Problem resolution steps common to most situations**

Listen to the employee and ensure the nature and concern is understood. Whether the concern about an apparent "scented product" relates to a discomfort, annoyance issue or a more severe physical reaction, attempt to assess the nature and extent of the concern. Some sample questions that may assist you in isolating a possible cause are:

- Does this discomfort occur at a particular time of day or at a particular location in the workplace
- Does the discomfort arise only in the workplace or elsewhere as well?

In many circumstances scented products may not be the sole cause, or primary cause, of the employee's signs and symptoms, although that may be the initial perception. Other factors could be poor indoor air quality, time of year (flu or hay fever season).

Investigate the issue and use good judgment and consideration to provide a fair, uniform and timely resolution.

Discuss the issue with your staff in an open and non-threatening manner and request cooperation.

Refer those issues which cannot be resolved to Human Resources or the General Manager.

### **What is the USC doing about it?**

Recognizing that chemicals, including scented chemicals, can negatively impact indoor air quality, the USC will strive to:

- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including scented products.
- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products in cleaning products and building materials.
- Target harmful chemicals and contaminants and implement controls to effectively prevent or minimize their release into the general air.
- Support the best possible air quality practicably attainable, by means of proper ventilation, peak performance and proper maintenance of building mechanical ventilation systems.

### **USC Resource**

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