

Faculty of Medicine Scent-Free Program

Overview

When we talk about **scents**, we mean aromas, or fragrances – anything that adds smell to something (1). Scents can be found in personal care products, household items, and the workplace.

Examples of commonly used scented products

Personal use products

Laundry detergents

Fabric softeners

Anti-cling products

Soaps

Perfumes

Body lotions and sprays

Colognes and aftershave

Products used within office space

Candles

Potpourri

Essential oils

Flowering plants

Scented cleaning products

Air fresheners

Exposure to scented products can negatively impact a person's health (2). There is evidence to suggest that up to 30% of the general population experience irritation or adverse health effects from exposure to scented products (3). The Canadian Lung Association indicates that the harmful effects of scented products are not actually caused by the smell itself, but instead the chemicals used to produce the smell (1). It is estimated that there are more than 3,000 chemicals used in the manufacturing of fragrances with individual products containing dozens or even hundreds of fragrance-related chemicals (4).

It has been reported that the majority of chemicals used in fragrances are synthetic compounds derived from petroleum, which include volatile organic compounds that have been classified as toxic or hazardous at sufficiently elevated exposures (5,6). For instance, a commonly used chemical used to make scents last longer called *diethyl phthalate*, has been classified as a



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reproductive toxin (1). *Toluene*, another common chemical used as a solvent in pharmaceutical and cosmetic products, has been associated with central nervous system and respiratory system dysfunction after exposure in high concentrations (7). Even products labeled 'fragrance-free' or 'unscented' may contain toxic chemicals used to mask the smell of certain ingredients (2). Some fragrance chemicals are of particular concern because they don't readily break down in the environment and thus tend to build up (bioaccumulate) in human tissue (8).

As a result of their chemical make-up, scented products, even in the smallest amounts, can trigger a negative health response in those individuals with scent sensitivities or other serious medical conditions. Reported symptoms associated with exposure to scented products include but are not limited to: headaches, migraines, fatigue, nausea, asthma attacks, loss of concentration, sinus congestion, skin irritation, and loss of coordination (1). Symptom severity can vary, ranging from mild irritation to incapacitation.

Purpose of the Faculty of Medicine Scent-Free Program

The Faculty of Medicine (FoM) wishes to recognize that serious health concerns can arise from exposure to scented products. In order to provide faculty, staff, students, and visitors a safe, healthy, and productive work environment, all FoM facilities are scent free. To achieve this, ***the use of scented products in FoM facilities is to be avoided.*** The scent-free program is in effect at all times, even when the workplace is closed for business.

This program will affect all faculty, staff, students, and visitors using or working within all FoM property.

Scent-Free Program Guidelines

The following outlines how the FoM will create and promote a scent free environment and support individuals who experience scent sensitivities.

Faculty, Staff, Students, and Visitors

- Refrain from using scented products in FoM facilities.
- Notify your immediate supervisor of your health issues related to scent exposure.

- Where possible, directly approach a person wearing or using a scent to resolve the scent related issue.
 - Approach the person in a polite and professional manner.
- Respond to colleagues positively and professionally, should they approach you about a scent you are wearing or using that may be causing health related symptoms.
- When a direct approach to resolving a scent issue is not possible or has proven ineffective, report the issue to the immediate supervisor and/or human resources manager.

Facilities Management

- Unscented cleaning products are required to be used within FoM facilities, wherever possible (as per the Memorial University Green Cleaning Initiative).
- Low odor maintenance products are to be used on equipment whenever possible. In the event that no suitable product is available, limit use to non-peak hours.

Supervisors and Managers

- Take appropriate action to inform faculty, staff, students, and visitors of the scent-free program and ensure the conditions of the program are implemented and enforced.
- Ensure the adequate and appropriate placement of scent-free signage throughout the FoM facilities.
- Provide support to individuals reporting physical symptoms related to scented products.
- Work collaboratively to identify possible solutions to scent issues.



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- Directly approach an individual wearing or using scented products to discuss concerns.
- If scent related issues persist, contact the Director of Administrative Services for their direct involvement.

Occupational Health and Safety Committee

- Promote a scent-free work space through regular meetings and newsletters.
- Make supervisors/managers aware of scent issues during routine Occupational Health and Safety Committee inspections.
- Receive, investigate, and act on, if necessary, any complaints regarding the use of scents in the workplace.

Related Links

[The Lung Association](#)

[Eastern Health Scent-Free Policy](#)

[Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Scent-Free policy for the workplace](#)



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References

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- (4) Fisher BE. Scents and sensitivity. *Environ Health Perspect* 1998 Dec;106(12):A594-9.
- (5) Steinemann AC, MacGregor IC, Gordon SM, Gallagher LG, Davis AL, Ribeiro DS, Wallace LA. Fragranced consumer products: Chemicals emitted, ingredients unlisted. *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* 2011 Apr;31(3):328-333.
- (6) Potera C. Scented products emit a bouquet of VOCs. *Environ Health Perspect* 2011 Jan;119(1):A16-a16.
- (7) Kopelovich L, Perez AL, Jacobs N, Mendelsohn E, Keenan JJ. Screening-level human health risk assessment of toluene and dibutyl phthalate in nail lacquers. *Food Chem Toxicol* 2015 Jul;81:46-53.
- (8) Go fragrance-free | Green your workplace | What you can do | David Suzuki Foundation. Available at: <http://www.davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/green-your-workplace/go-fragrance-free/>. Accessed 10/13/2015, 2015.