Fragrances don’t smell beautiful to everyone.

Fragrance and scent free policies developed for easy implementation within health care institutions.
Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

1.1 Why fragrances are a concern
Synthetic fragrances are largely made up of man-made substances manufactured from petrochemicals. They are used as additives in thousands of products including perfumes, soaps, detergents, and cleaners. Fragrance is not a single ingredient, but rather a term used to summarize a sub-set of chemical ingredients that together create appealing aromas. What is not appealing is that many of the chemicals used to create fragrances are toxic. Manufacturers are not required to disclose which specific chemicals are used to create the fragrances in their products as this is considered proprietary information.

However, chemical analysis of fragrances has revealed that some ingredients are potentially hazardous as they contain substances known from occupational and animal studies to be carcinogens, developmental toxins, or neurotoxicants at higher exposure levels. Some ingredients can act as endocrine disruptors at exceedingly low levels.

Because of the very common use of fragrances by a large percentage of the population in everyday consumer products, there is a high potential for ongoing human exposure to many fragrance ingredients in complex mixtures. Human vulnerability to adverse health impacts from hazardous chemicals varies considerably (McKeown-Eyssen et al, 2004; Canadian Partnership for Children’s Health and the Environment, 2005). While there is insufficient knowledge of their long term health impacts, many fragrance ingredients are known to be skin and respiratory irritants. Some ingredients are also sensitizers that can provoke allergic responses on future encounters with even very small amounts of those substances (Toxnet, 2010).

Approximately one-third of Canadians reportedly experience troubling symptoms when exposed to fragrance (Sears, Margaret E., 2007). Symptoms triggered by exposure to fragrances can include rashes, headaches, dizziness, difficulty concentrating, feeling dull, groggy, or spacey, fatigue, watery eyes, runny, stuffy nose and sinuses, wheezing and shortness of breath (Neilson, 2001; Schnuch, 2002; Elberling, 2004, 2007; Caress and Steinemann, 2005).

Moreover, over one million Canadians (approx. 3%) have been diagnosed with environmental sensitivities/multiple chemical sensitivity. People with environmental sensitivities (ES) chronically experience symptoms when they are exposed to a variety of chemicals or other environmental agents (including fragrance chemicals) at low levels tolerated by most people (See web site: Womens Health Matters, Environmental Health Centre.) People with a diagnosis of ES have a recognized disability under the Canadian Human Rights Code (CHRC) and therefore must be accommodated in the workplace and in the built environment (e.g. healthcare buildings).
1.2 Need for fragrance free programs and policies in health care

It is important for health care facilities to be cognizant of the short and long term fragrance health impacts, for the sake of patients, visitors, and staff. It is also important that the indoor environments of hospitals and health care facilities be as free from hazardous substances as possible. Substances within fragrances that provoke asthma or trigger asthma attacks, asthmagens, are of particular concern to hospital staff. Hospitals have the highest reported rate of occupational asthma (Pechter et al., 2005). While chemical cleaners have been identified as the main culprits for this trend, many of these contain masking scents. Hospitals and other health care facilities should make a concerted effort to reduce all sources of asthmagens, including fragrances and scents.

Moreover, to comply with Canadian and provincial Human Rights legislation, healthcare facilities must accommodate staff and patients diagnosed with ES. Fragrance-free policies and programs provide a critical step in accommodating these individuals, in addition to providing a healthier and safer environment for all.

1.3 What’s in this kit to assist you in raising awareness and developing a policy in your facility

In response to these health concerns and CHRC legislation, many hospitals have implemented fragrance/scent-free programs and policies for patients, visitors and staff. While enforcing these policies is sometimes challenging, there are effective steps a health care facility can take that are outlined in this kit. Learning from hospitals who have implemented fragrance/scent free programs and policies will help others to do the same.

This kit will help you to develop and successfully implement a Fragrance Free program and policy at your facility. The kit includes:

- Success stories to share how other facilities have done it
- Steps to develop your Fragrance Free program and policy
- Information to develop a policy, and
- How to increase awareness of Fragrance Free initiatives at your facility.

1 Enactment of Human Rights legislation may vary from province to province (i.e. provinces may be at different stages of implementation).
2. Success Stories

2.1 Nova Scotia
Dalhousie University has had a pioneering “We Share the Air” policy in place since 1995. With permission, the name, logo and principles have been adopted by the University of Calgary (and subsequently by Alberta Health Services) and McMaster University in Hamilton, ON. Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax pioneered a universal “Smoking, Scents and Air Quality” policy at all their sites in 1996 (Marsh B., 1998). A Department of Health spokesperson indicated that an Indoor Air Quality-Scent Free Policy had been prepared years ago by the Joint Master Occupational Health and Safety Committee in Nova Scotia, with the overarching guide being the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The policy was approved by the Deputy Minister, and is now administered by the Occupational Health and Safety Committees in local/regional Public Health offices. In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Workforce Development, Occupational Health and Safety Division, administers indoor air quality regulations, and the Ministry’s website (http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/) reveals that, in Nova Scotia, schools are scent free, as well as some public places such as art galleries, and that many government buildings and departments have “scent-reduced environments”. Karen Robinson, a long-time member of the Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia and Canadians for a Safe Learning Environment thought the success in Nova Scotia has been due in part to legislation/regulations, in part to public campaigning by patient-support organizations with widespread media coverage over more than 10 years, followed by widely visible scent-free posters and information in offices, public buildings and hospitals.

2.2 Ontario
Women’s College Hospital, with its provincial Environmental Health Clinic, has been a leader in developing awareness-raising mechanisms and a “Fragrance Free Environment” policy.

2.3 Alberta
The Peter Lougheed Centre, under Alberta Health Services, has followed Dalhousie University and the University of Calgary in its “We Share the Air Scent-Free Awareness Campaign”.

2.4 New Brunswick
The New Brunswick Lung Association enquired about hospital policies and was told that all hospitals are scent-reduced and some are scent-free. Different policies are set up for each individual facility, although they all operate under two regional health authorities (RHAs). However, the RHAs are currently being re-structured, and when complete, a uniform policy is planned.

2.5 Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care Survey
In spring/summer of 2010 asked 19 hospitals about toxics use in their facilities. Hospitals more likely to be interested in toxics use reduction were selected through literature reviews that provided information on those who had won environmental awards, had written their own case studies on ‘green’ cleaning, or were mentioned on ‘green’ vendor sites.
One of the survey questions was: “Does your facility have a scent-free policy?”

The responses to this question indicate that this issue has been taken seriously by hospital administrators, as 14 out of 19 or 74% (listed below) had scent-free policies.

ONTARIO (Number of beds, where known, is in parentheses)
1. Stevenson Memorial Hospital (43)
2. Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital (280)
3. The Ottawa Hospital (950)
4. Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital (78)
5. Hanover District Hospital (37)
6. Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (375)
7. St. Mary’s General Hospital (156)
8. Princess Margaret (220)
9. London Health Sciences/SJHC (846)
10. North Bay General Hospital (188)
11. Peterborough Regional Health Centre (355)
12. Grey Bruce Health Services (217)
13. Women’s College Hospital

NEW BRUNSWICK
14. St John Regional Hospital (381)

NOVA SCOTIA
15. Cape Breton Regional Health Authority (326)
3. Steps to Making your Facility Fragrance Free

The experience of the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital, Toronto has been that a step-wise process needs to unfold before facilities truly become fragrance/scent free. It helps to first step forward to a Fragrance Free Encouragement Program and then to step up to a Fragrance Free Policy.

3.1 Sample Steps, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has included a list of steps in Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace, which can be found in its entirety at: www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html (last updated May 6, 2010).

Note: The EHI encourages the use of ‘Fragrance-Free’ rather than ‘Scent-Free’.

The steps and potential questions for an employee survey are reproduced with the permission of CCOHS, 2010.

What steps should I take when implementing a fragrance/scent-free policy in the workplace?

As with most workplace policies, be sure to consider the following:

- Conduct an assessment or survey of the employees to determine the extent of the issue. Collect opinions and suggestions at the same time to help you develop a policy appropriate to your workplace. (A sample survey is located at the end of this document.)
- Designate one key person to oversee the project and its development. If you work at a large company, it may better to create a committee with members representing all groups (employees, unions, management).
- Involve the health and safety committee, and get management commitment from the beginning.
- Set and stick to deadlines for creating a draft policy, a review of the policy, and for implementation.
- Be sure that all employees have been fully informed of the policy and that they know what they have to do before the policy becomes effective.
- Educate the employees. You may choose to include brochures or flyers in payroll envelopes, publish articles in company newsletter, or give presentations. In any case, the goal is to inform all employees of the health concerns related to scents and why the policy is needed.
- Address any concerns the employees raise openly and honestly. Reinforce the idea that this policy is being implemented as a result of medical concerns - not merely because of a dislike for a certain smell.
- Make it clear that the policy applies to everyone (including visitors, patients, etc).
- Search local legislation for any supporting documentation.
- Do not limit the scent free policy to perfumes and colognes. As listed above, many cleaning and personal care products also have scents.
- Post a list of "approved" unscented products and where they are available locally.
- Review all MSDSs for the products currently used and for those you are considering using. Make sure that the ingredients are acceptable. Remember that some products which claim to be scent-free may be using additional chemicals to mask smells instead of truly being "unscented".
- Conduct trials in limited areas before purchasing large quantities of a product.
• Post notices that waxing, shampooing, painting, or spraying (etc) will be conducted one week beforehand so that affected personnel can make arrangements or have their duties modified during that time.
• Put the policy statement notice on all appointment cards, stationery, room booking notices, employment postings, etc.
• Decide on wording for 'Fragrance/Scent Free' signs and where the signs will be posted.
• Let everyone know that the policy will be reviewed and can be changed because of experience or new knowledge.

What are sample questions for an employee survey?

Sample questions include:

1. Have you ever been affected by scented products?
   • If so, in what way
2. Do you feel our company should offer programs encouraging employees to reduce the use of scents? (Yes, No)
3. How should our company become scent-free?
   • Change from heavily scented products to non-scented or low-scented products?
   • Offer awareness sessions to employees about the health concerns related to scented products?
   • Offer other incentives? If so, describe.
4. Do you use any scented products such as shampoo, soap, hand lotions, perfumes, cologne, hair spray, or deodorant before arriving at work? (Yes, No, Not Sure)
5. Would you accept a Scent-Free policy for ABC Company? (Yes, No)
   • If you are not willing to accept a Scent-Free policy, please describe why:
6. Do you have any additional comments?

4. Fragrance Free Encouragement Program

4.1 The First Step
The first step towards a fragrance/scent-free facility is building awareness and encouraging voluntary participation.

With permission from the originating Dalhousie University, Alberta Health Services, Peter Loughheed Centre, employed the “We Share the Air” logo, with their name inserted. The University of Calgary and McMaster University have done the same.
4.2 Sample Program Announcement

The Peter Lougheed Centre, Alberta Health Services, sent out the following official program announcement on letterhead about the “We Share the Air” Scent-Free Awareness Campaign.

Message from the PLC Management Team:
“We Share the Air” Scent-Free Awareness Campaign

October 1, 2009

To all staff of the Peter Lougheed Centre,

The PLC is committed to the health and well-being of the staff, patients and visitors that make up our community. One of Alberta Health Services’ goals is to “increase education and support to better assist Albertans to make healthy choices and protect their health”. The Scent-Free Awareness Campaign is one opportunity to contribute towards this goal.

In Canada today, more than one in four individuals suffers from respiratory disease. Over 40% of these individuals have allergic triggers to their disease. Medical evidence indicates that many scented products are harmful to the health of sensitive individuals. In sufficient concentrations, scented products may be harmful to those with allergies, environmental sensitivity or chronic heart or lung disease. Some products you are using may be making someone else ill.

To address the health needs and concerns of our patients, and to provide a healthy working environment for all staff, a Scent-Free Awareness Campaign is being launched effective November 1st, 2009. The campaign, called “We Share the Air”, will aim to educate staff to be more scent-aware, and will provide information about alternative unscented products that are easily available. All staff members are encouraged to help improve the indoor air quality of our facility by avoiding the use of scented personal care products when at work.

“We Share the Air” is an initiative of the East Wing Development Team, the PLC Management Team and the PLC Occupational Health & Safety Committee, with input from staff and other interested stakeholders. We encourage you to review this website for more information on going scent-free and for more awareness of how we do, in fact, “share the air”.

Sue Gudmundson, Vice President, PLC

Wendy Dirkson, Site Director, PLC
4.3 Sample Fragrance-Free Program webpage content
The Peter Lougheed Centre, Alberta Health Services also posted “Webpage Information” about the Scent-free Campaign on their website, as well as “Scent Free Alternatives” and a “Q&A”.

4.3.1 “Fragrance-free Campaign- Webpage Information”
(NOTE — This Campaign was originally developed using the term ‘Scent-free’ while current thought is to use the term ‘Fragrance Free’ instead. “Unscented” products frequently have masking chemicals. The EHC are advising the use of products labelled “fragrance-free” and asking that people check the back of the label for parfum or fragrance. For more information see the David Suzuki Foundation. In this document we substituted the words ‘Scent-free’ with ‘Fragrance-free’.

To: Internal file – PLC LEED submittal
From: PERSONS NAME, Lead - Environmental Sustainability
Re: Fragrance-free campaign – Webpage information

Purpose:
This information will posted online under a special section dedicated to the fragrance-free awareness campaign. (Information is courtesy of U of C)

Fragrance-Free Awareness Campaign (Webpage title)

The Peter Lougheed Center’s “We Share the Air” Fragrance-Free Awareness Campaign program is a joint health promotion project of the East Wing Development Team, the PLC Management Team and the PLC Occupational Health & Safety Committee. The entire PLC community is asked to participate by being more aware of the impact of scented personal care products on the health of others.

Message from PLC Management Team
Click here for a message from PERSONS NAME (PLC VP) and PERSONS NAME (PLC Site Director).

Fragrance-Free Q & A
For more information about health effects related to scented personal care products and why the PLC has chosen to launch a fragrance-free awareness campaign, click here.

Fragrance-Free Alternatives
We ask for your support in limiting or eliminating the use of scented personal care products in the workplace. For more information on the many fragrance-free alternatives that are available, click here. By making these choices, you will contribute to promoting health and wellness for all staff, patients and visitors of the PLC.

How to Handle Scent-sitive Situations
Commenting upon a person's choice of personal care products can be interpreted as personal criticism. For ideas and suggestions on how to deal effectively with scent-related situations in the workplace, click here.

Fragrance Free Implementation Kit for Health Care Facilities
Contact Us
If you have a question about the “We Share the Air” Fragrance-Free Awareness Campaign, send an email to PERSON NAME, Lead - Environmental Sustainability.

External Links
Click here for links to external information about going Fragrance-Free. We would like to thank Dalhousie University and the University of Calgary for the use of the "We Share the Air" logo and campaign information.
Fragrance Free Alternatives

There are many, fragrance-free alternatives available. All of the major grocery chains and drug stores carry an assortment of these products at comparable prices to the scented versions. Often, your favourite brand-name product will come in a fragrance-free version as well.

Look in your favorite grocery or drug store for:

- Fragrance-free deodorant
- Fragrance-free hairspray, hair gel
- Fragrance-free hand lotion
- Fragrance-free face cream
- Fragrance-free shaving cream
- Fragrance-free body lotion
- Fragrance-free feminine products
- Fragrance-free baby wipes
- Fragrance-free fabric softener drier sheets
- Fragrance-free hand soap, bath soap
- Fragrance-free sunscreen
- Fragrance-free shampoos and conditioners

Click here for a list of fragrance-free personal care products by major brand names.

Did you know?

- one of the very best air freshener/cleaners is baking soda
- one of the best household cleaners is white vinegar
4.3.3 “Fragrance-free campaign- Q&A”

To: Internal file – PLC LEED submittal
From: PERSONS NAME, Lead, Environmental Sustainability
Re: Fragrance-free campaign – Q&A

Date: September 25, 2009

Purpose:
This Q&A will posted on the PLC Fragrance-Free Awareness campaign webpage. The information below should be put into PDF format and included on the webpage as a link.

Source:
Information is courtesy of U of C and CHR OH&S Procedure and Information Manual July 2006.

Questions & Answers

1. Why is the Peter Lougheed Centre going fragrance-free?
The PLC is committed to the health and wellbeing of the staff, patients and visitors that make up our community. One of Alberta Health Services’ goals is to “increase education and support to better assist Albertans to make healthy choices and protect their health”. The Fragrance-Free Awareness Campaign is one opportunity to contribute towards this goal.

In Canada today, more than one in four individuals suffers from respiratory disease. Over 40% of these individuals have allergic triggers to their disease. Medical evidence clearly shows that most scented products are harmful to the health of sensitive individuals. In sufficient concentrations, scented products may be harmful to those with allergies, environmental sensitivity or chronic heart or lung disease. Some products you are using may be making someone else ill.

The Peter Lougheed Center’s fragrance-free campaign aims to reduce the harmful effects of scented products in our hospital. Many personal care products that we use on a daily basis contain chemical fragrances and scents that can be damaging to our health. These include:

- Perfume, cologne, aftershave lotion
- Deodorant
- Hair care products including shampoos, conditioners, gels, mousses, hairsprays
- Hand and body soap
- Hand and body lotions
- Makeup
- Shaving cream
- Sunscreen
- Laundry soap and stain removers
- Dryer fabric softener sheets
- Air fresheners, scented candles

By avoiding the use of heavily scented products *while at work*, you can help improve the air quality in our facilities and support a healthy environment for our patients, visitors and staff.
2. **What can I do to prevent harming people affected by scents?**

You can adopt fragrance-free practices by avoiding using perfumes, aftershaves, colognes, and scented lotions and opting for "fragrance-free" versions of such personal care products. Many fragrance-free personal care products can be found at your local drugstore or pharmacy.

3. **I know people who have allergies to certain foods or animals. I don't know anyone who has a reaction from coming into contact with scented products. How real is this concern?**

It is very real. It's well documented that the incidence of asthma is on the increase, especially in young people. In fact, there are many environmental illnesses – illnesses triggered by things in our environment. Among the best known are spring and summer allergies to pollen from flowers, grasses, and trees. Another is air pollution from vehicles or smoke.

It is also known that asthma and migraine headaches have multiple triggers, including chemical exposure. Asthma attacks can be set off by pollen, moulds, extreme cold, dust, and exposure to chemicals, including paint and perfume. Bright light, loud noise, foods such as chocolate, a change in barometric pressure (chinooks), exposure to paint and fragranced cleaning and personal care products can all trigger migraine attacks. So it is well known that exposure to materials in the environment can cause illness in people with sensitivities. There are also people who suffer from sensitivity to multiple chemical triggers. This condition is called Multiple Chemical Sensitivity or MCS.

4. **What is Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)?**

A Multiple Chemical Sensitivity is an acquired illness characterized by severe reaction to exposures easily tolerated by most individuals. Common triggers include volatile organic compounds (VOCs) of the sort often found in paints, cleaning products, perfumes and fragranced personal care products, gasoline and similar products, as well as such naturally-occurring substances as citrus oils and turpene's in softwood. Reactions range from sinus congestion and watery eyes through more serious reactions such as temporary rashes, flu-like symptoms with headache, nausea, and muscle or joint pain, to debilitating reactions including migraine and asthma attack.

The only reliable way to avoid painful and dangerous reactions is for the MCS sufferer to avoid as many triggers as possible. While people with MCS are responsible for ensuring that their home environments are as free as possible from chemical triggers, they require the cooperation of others to make their workplaces and recreational sites safe.

5. **What is the difference between an allergy and a 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. However, there is no medication to relieve the symptoms - the only "treatment" is to avoid exposure.

6. Isn't the request to adopt fragrance-free practices intrusive on the individual's right to wear whatever he or she wants?

It may seem at first that asking people to use fragrance-free personal care products touches on a personal and private matter. But when the scents from these products affect the health and well-being of patients and co-workers, it then goes beyond just being a matter of private concerns. The goal of this awareness program is to prevent harm to others, and to give staff the right information so their can make their own choices about scented products.

7. Why should I adopt fragrance-free practices when there isn't anyone in my unit or work area who suffers from an allergy or sensitivity? The perfume I wear and the scented products I use aren't bothering anyone.

Perhaps someone is suffering in silence. Or maybe you will come in contact with someone with a sensitivity during the day – in the cafeteria, in a meeting, on the elevator or in a patient room. By putting all the responsibility for coming forward on the person who is the most at risk of becoming ill, you increase their chances of having a reaction – they have to approach the person wearing a scent that triggers a reaction in them, in order to ask that person to refrain from using scented products.

8. If we ask people to use fragrance-free products, perhaps they will stop using personal care products altogether. Could poor hygiene and strong body odour be the result?

Experience in other places that have implemented fragrance-free programs have shown that this is not a likely consequence. They are many alternatives to scented personal care products. This campaign is not about telling people what they should and shouldn’t do, but rather to educate and allow them to make the decision they feel is right for the comfort of others in the workplace.

9. How do I find fragrance-free products?

Going fragrance-free may not be as difficult as you think. Many brand name personal care items come in "fragrance-free", or versions. These are available at your local grocery store and pharmacy. They include a wide range of items from hair care, body lotions, and deodorants to laundry and home cleaning products.

An easy and cost-free step to becoming scent-free is to avoid wearing perfume or cologne at work.

10. What's the difference between "fragrance free", "scent-free", and "unscented"?

All of these terms are used in industry. Products labelled “scent-free” or “unscented” may contain chemicals that mask the odour of the product. Therefore, these terms do not guarantee that a product won't trigger symptoms in someone who has sensitivity to fragrance. Products
labelled as “fragrance free” generally do not contain any added fragrance and therefore are better tolerated by most people.

To be sure that the product that you purchase doesn’t contain fragrance, look at the ingredient list on the back of the product. If “fragrance” or “parfum” is listed as an ingredient, it means that the product does contain fragrance – even if it’s labelled as “unscented” or “scent-free” or “fragrance-free”. Choose the product that doesn’t list fragrance or parfum as an ingredient. For more information see www.lessstoxicguide.ca.

11. I’ve heard that it is fine to wear scents, as long as they remain within my "scent-circle" (within an arm's length of me). Is that true?

The "scent-circle" is an idea which sounds good but which 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. They are picked up by the currents of air that constantly move around us, and the fragrances are dispersed into the atmosphere we all breathe. Fragrances are volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and it's their nature to linger 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 elevators, patient rooms and hallways do not allow us to keep an arm's length from others.

12. What about the use of dangerous cleaning and maintenance chemicals in buildings?

The Peter Lougheed Center has altered its use of custodial and maintenance chemicals. We use environmentally friendly paints and chemicals in processes where there is an available cost-effective substitute. We have systematically replaced problematic janitorial chemicals with less scented and generally safer products. If you have concerns about any particular product, please contact the PLC Occupational Health and Safety Committee.
4.4 Sample Corporate Signage
The Ontario Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital has designed the poster we have used as a cover for this kit to raise awareness of the hazards to health that perfumes, colognes, and other scented products pose to some patients and staff. Posters are placed at elevators, in waiting areas, beside bank machines, in the lobby and inside elevators.

Please note: An adaptation of the Fragrance-Free poster may be designed and used in your facility, however, for permission to use this fragrance free policy, please contact Strategic Communications (Strategic_Communications@wchospital.ca) at Women’s College Hospital.

Over one million Canadians feel sick when exposed to fragrances. That's why, at Women's College Hospital, we have a fragrance-free policy.

Please respect it. Wear fragrance-free antiperspirant, lotion, after shave and hair products while at Women's College Hospital, and please do not wear perfume or cologne. Thank you.

Provided by the Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital.
5. Fragrance Free Policy

5.1 Get Started
The step up to a formal corporate fragrance free policy can be taken much more easily once a fragrance or scent-free encouragement program is established.

5.2 Sample Policy - Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety has supplied a sample Scent-Free Policy at http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html, which is included here with their permission.
Note: the EHI encourages the use of the term “Fragrance-free’ rather than ‘Scent-free’.

What is an example of a policy? Policies should be based on the health concerns of employees. The policy must also apply uniformly throughout the company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample: Scent-Free Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to the health concerns arising from exposure to scented products, ABC Company Inc. has instituted this policy to provide a scent-free environment for all employees and visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of scented products will not be allowed within the building at any time. In addition, all materials used for cleaning will be scent-free. A list of locally available scent-free products is available from the health and safety office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees will be informed of this policy through signs posted in buildings, the policy manual, promotional materials and will receive orientation and training. Visitors will be informed of this policy through signs and it will be explained to them by their host. This policy is effective on 01/01/10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Women’s College Hospital Sample Fragrance Free Environment Policy

This sample policy was developed by Women’s College Hospital, and may be adapted for use in your facility as long as the following recognition is included: “Provided by the Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital”.

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**POLICY STATEMENT:**

It is Women’s College Hospital Policy to make a commitment to the provision of a healthy, safe and accessible environment and to assume a leadership role in the promotion of an environment that provides optimum air quality.

Women’s College Hospital will strive to ensure fragrances from chemical substances, physical agents, and biological substance are eliminated, whenever possible, or minimized.

Women’s College Hospital will support its Fragrance Free policy in all buildings. Wherever possible, we will endeavor to eliminate the use of scented products, which may cause health problems for patients, staff, students, faculty, volunteers and visitors.

Staff, physicians, volunteers, students, faculty, patients, residents and visitors are to refrain from wearing scented personal care products within Women’s College Hospital.

Wherever possible, we will purchase products with no fragrance, or minimal fragrance. This includes, but is not limited to, cleaning products and hand hygiene products.

**DEFINITION(S):**

- **Scented Personal Products**
  
  Refers to any scented personal care products including, but not limited to, perfume, cologne, essential oils, scented aftershave lotions, scented deodorant, scented moisturizing hand, body or face lotions, scented sunscreen, scented hair spray, and any scented hair mousse/gel.

- **Women’s College Hospital**
  
  Refers to any building, or space that provides services under the auspices of the corporation.

- **Individual**
  
  Refers to any person who is employed by Women’s College Hospital, anyone working under contractual agreements, students, faculty, volunteers, medical/dental/nursing staff, Board members, researchers, and others carrying out business on behalf of Women’s College Hospital.

**POLICY:**

1. Scents:
   - Women’s College Hospital will display appropriate information and signage to encourage staff, volunteers, physicians, students, faculty, and visitors to refrain from wearing scented personal care products.
   - An awareness program to support the policy will be developed and administered by the organization.
   - At the time of employment and orientation, all staff will be advised that Women’s College Hospital is a fragrance free environment.

Every individual has the responsibility to administer this policy. Individuals are expected to communicate the hospital’s commitment to this policy to individuals who are using scented products. Communication of this policy must be done in a cordial and respectful manner. If an individual is not comfortable communicating this policy to the person using scented personal care products, they may discuss the concern with their supervisor. [See Administrative Manual, Discrimination and Harassment]

The Women’s College Hospital internet version of this document is considered the most current.

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**Issued By:** Human Resources  
**Original Issued:** February 2007  
**Revised:** February 2007

**Approved By:** Executive Team  
**Reviewed:** March 2010
5.4 Sample Phone Messaging
Women’s College Hospital (WCH) has found that a phone message left on the main hospital answering machine and program lines is helpful in reminding visitors and patients that the facility is fragrance free. The script used, after welcoming the caller, is as follows:

“Please be aware that Women’s College Hospital is a “fragrance free” hospital. We ask that all of our patients and visitors refrain from wearing perfume or scented products to protect other patients. If you would like more information on our fragrance free policy and initiatives, please visit our website at www.wchospital.ca or call the Environmental Health Clinic at 416 323 6400 ext. 4993”.

The script can be modified according to your facility’s preferences. It has been found helpful to provide the caller with access to the facility’s website and a knowledgeable person for further information. It may also help to print a similar message on the backs of appointment and staff business cards.

5.5 Sample Fragrance-Free Policy Brochure and Webpage Content
Queen Elizabeth II Health Sciences Centre in Halifax, N.S., the largest health care centre in Atlantic Canada since 1996, has the following information included in the welcome information pamphlet and webpage for new patients and visitors:

“Maintaining a Healthy Environment
The QEII strives to maintain a quality indoor air environment. Smoking on hospital property is strictly prohibited. This includes any grounds, gardens, or walkways that may exist on hospital property. In addition, scented products cause allergic reactions in many people. Please do not wear or use any scented products such as perfume, aftershave, hairspray, or lotions during your stay at the QEII. Please ask your visitors to do the same.”


5.6 Sample Management Presentation
Since it is key to have ‘buy in’ from the facility’s leadership/management in order for a fragrance/scent free policy to be successful, Nancy Bradshaw, the Community Outreach Coordinator of the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital (WCH) in Toronto has developed a power point presentation entitled “Healthcare and Fragrances: Scents and Sensitivities”. This presentation has been given ‘live’ to the leadership at WCH and program heads, as well as to school boards and regional governments. The presentation can also be made available for staff to view by webcast. The presentation PowerPoint is available on the Coalition website at:


This presentation may be used by other organizations as long as the following recognition is included:

“Provided by the Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital”.

Fragrance Free Implementation Kit for Health Care Facilities
WCH Fragrance-free Policy Management Presentation

Nancy Bradshaw
Community Outreach Coordinator
Environmental Health Clinic
March 2010

Background Information

- WCH Environmental Health Clinic is the only academically-affiliated, provincially-funded clinic in Ontario that addresses environmental sensitivities

- Having environmental sensitivities has been designated a disability protected by Canadian and Ontario Human Rights legislation and policies

- All hospitals have an obligation to protect patients, ensuring they don’t become ill when they seek and receive care

Background Information

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

- 80 – 90 percent of our time is spent indoors

- Indoor air is 2 – 5 times more polluted than outdoor air

- Fragrances are the most obvious indoor air pollutant 2nd to tobacco smoke

Background Information

Common sources of Indoor Air Pollutants

- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) - furniture, carpets, paint, solvents, perfumes/scents, copy machine toners, carbonless paper, computers/televisions, cleaning compounds, pesticides

- Healthcare-specific chemical emissions - from medications: chemicals used in radiology, pathology, endoscopy and laboratory; adhesives; and cleaning and sterilization of surgical and medical instruments (i.e. aldehydes)

- Biological contaminants - bacteria, viruses, mold, pollen, fungi - found in ventilation and humidification systems

- Carbon Monoxide - garages and loading docks

Background Information

Common sources of Fragrance in Healthcare

- Staff and visitors who are wearing perfume, cologne or aftershave; scented cosmetics, skin lotions or hair products

- Scented cleaning products, floor wax, paint

- Healthcare-specific chemical emissions: medications; chemicals used in radiology, pathology, endoscopy and laboratory; adhesives; and cleaning and sterilization of surgical and medical instruments (i.e. aldehydes).

Chemical components of Perfumes and Fragrance

- Up to 4,000 ingredients in manufacture of fragrances

- Up to 500 ingredients in a single perfume

- 95% are petroleum-based volatile organic compounds (VOCs), many known to be respiratory irritants/sensitizers

- Fixatives (e.g. phthalates) often used to aid persistence of the scent known endocrine disruptors

- Some ingredients have been linked with cancer, birth defects and neurotoxic effects at higher exposure levels
Ingredients in Fragrances Linked with Cancer and Birth Defects

- Methylene chloride
- Toluene
- Ethanol
- Methyl ethyl ketone
- Tert Butyl
- Sec Butyl
- Benzyl chloride

Compiled by comparing 129 fragrance chemicals from the EPA and California's Prop 65 database.

Neurotoxic Ingredients Found in Fragranced Products

- Hexachlorophene
- Cetyl-ethyl-tetramethyl-tetralin
- 1 Butanol
- Isobutanol
- Toluene

Compiled from TOXLIN database of fragrance industry and medical journals.

Cosmetics and Fragrance Industry

- Modern fragrances are primarily synthetic materials, developed since World War II (80-90%).
- Regulation is largely done by the industry itself – perfumes have a "trade secret status" therefore government regulation is limited.
- There are few industry studies on inhaling fragrance chemicals, and they are not routinely tested for chronic neurotoxic and systemic effects.

Common Symptoms Linked with Perfume Exposure

- Symptom Presentation with Exposure
  - Rash
  - Watery eyes
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Dizziness
  - Runny, stuffy nose, sinuses
  - "Groggy" or "spacey" feeling
  - Headaches
  - Fatigue
  - Wheezing, shortness of breath

Perfumes and Fragrances: Health Effects

- Contact sensitization to fragrances is one of the most common causes of contact allergy (Braun, S., et al. 2013; Sodhi, A., et al. 2020).
- People with perfume contact allergy or hand eczema have more frequent and severe eye and/or airway symptoms associated with perfume exposure (Sterling, L., et al. 2009).
- Patients with respiratory symptoms related to perfume show increased release of histamine (Sterling, L., et al. 2007).

Perfumes and Fragrances: Health Effects

- Prolonged inhalation of fragrances influences the ANS (pupil rate, blood pressure) and "mood" - alertness, restlessness (Heuveling, et al. 2001).
- Synergistic effects of perfumes and other chemicals unknown – however, the more chemicals combined, the lower the levels needed to induce sensory irritation (Cain and Conetta-Hunt, 1995).
Asthma Facts
- Asthma affects approximately 3 million Canadians.
- In Canada, there are 146,000 emergency room visits from asthma attacks annually.
- Asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism from school and the third leading cause of work loss.
- Worldwide, the economic losses associated with asthma exceed those of TB and AIDS combined.

Asthma Society of Canada, 2005

Asthma and Perfumes
- Asthmatics are more severely bothered by perfume exposure than non-asthmatics (Shering, J., 2005).
- Placebo-controlled studies have shown that asthma-like symptoms can be provoked by perfume (Mizutani E., Loehfgen, D., and Hilsenrath, B. and Loehfgen, 1996).
- Case report: health care worker, no hx of asthma or reactions to fragrances, experienced anaphylactic reaction when sprayed in the face with perfume, and continued to need oral bronchodilators at 2 month follow-up (Leversage, J.L., 2002).

Asthma and Perfumes
- Perfumes are a recognized trigger of asthma and work-related asthma (including healthcare workers).


Sensitivity to Fragrances
- Once sensitivity develops, symptoms occur with each subsequent exposure, even at low levels.
- Often difficult to determine which chemical(s) are involved.
- Severity of symptoms varies from one individual to another.

Canada
- Approximately 1/3 of the Canadian population is bothered by fragrances (complain of symptoms from exposure) (Drake, R. Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2007).

United States
- 16 – 33% of U.S population "especially sensitive" to chemicals, including perfume (Dav, 1998, 1999; Hagg, 1994).

Europe
- Danish study - ~42% of the population surveyed had at least one eye or airway symptom associated with perfume exposure (Shering, J. et al, 2005).
Most Vulnerable?

- Asthmatics
- Allergic or "sensitized" – i.e. contact allergy
- Women and unborn babies
- Children – developing, active, eat, drink and breathe more per kg. body weight than adults

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS)

Environmental Sensitivities (ES)

- Symptoms occur with repeated chemical exposure
- The condition is chronic
- Low levels of exposure manifest symptoms
- Symptoms improve when irritants are removed
- Responses occur to chemically unrelated substances
- Symptoms involve multiple organ systems
- 4 neurological symptoms most common:
  - Having a stronger sense of smell than others
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Feeling "foggy"
  - Feeling "sick"

Prevalence of MCS/ES

Canada
- 2.4% (~643,000) of population reported diagnosis
- 3.4% women (~2.5 x more prevalent in women than men) (Pauta, J., Trowbridge, D., 1987 – Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-003)
- 3.6% of all Canadian nurses experience chemical sensitivities (The 2003 National Survey of the Work and Health of Nurses)

United States
- 3-6% of population reported diagnosis by a physician (Jenn, P.E., Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2005)

Environmental Sensitivities: Legal Requirements

- ES is a disability covered by Canadian and provincial Human Rights Legislation
- Diagnosed individuals must be accommodated in the workplace
- Purpose: To prevent injuries/illnesses, reduce costs and health/safety risks

Accommodation for Those With Environmental Sensitivities (CHRC)

- Minimize or eliminate exposure to triggers in the environment by:
  - Developing and enforcing fragrance free and chemical avoidance policies
  - Undertaking educational programs to increase voluntary compliance
  - Minimizing chemical use and purchasing less toxic products
  - Notifying in advance of construction, remodeling, cleaning activities

Why Fragrance Free?

1. Improves work environment
   - Health and Safety ( Indoor air quality)
   - Equal access
   - Enhanced morale

2. Protects patients and staff
3. Decreases absenteeism and improves productivity
4. Links to organization’s Mission and Values
   - Respect
   - Equity
**Tips for success - workplace**

- Create an advisory committee to gather employee input and discuss the specifics of the policy or program recommendations
- Include discussion of enforcement in policy
- Address accommodation issues
- Address added "fragrance" versus odour

**Tips for success - workplace**

- Educate and make it easy - provide information on alternatives and give phase-in period
- Develop a communications mechanism, such as notices in payroll envelopes, signs in lobby, departments/offices, and voice message on main and program telephone lines
- Notify clients prior to appointment, if feasible
- Provide ongoing education – articles in newsletter, samples at “health and safety” days, notices on appointment/business cards, etc.

**What Can we Do?**

**It is as simple as asking our community to:**

- **NOT** wear perfume, cologne or scented aftershave products
- **NOT** wear scented products (lotions, antiperspirant/deodorant, creams etc.)
- **LOOK** for products labelled “fragrance-free”
- **USE** scent-free detergents and fabric softeners

**What Can You Do?**

**Do not wear to Work**

- Perfume
- Cologne
- Scented aftershave
- Scented hairspray, mousse, gel, putty, oils
- Scented creams, lotions, sunscreens
- Scented deodorant/antiperspirant
- Scented laundry products

**What Can You Do?**

- Read labels - avoid products with fragrance in the ingredient list
- Try different products, to see what works best for you
- Start with the most accessible and least expensive alternatives
- Ongoing education for visitors, staff and patients

**Corporate Initiatives**

- Fragrance free education – public places
- Corporate signage – fragrance free (elevator banks, wait areas, lobby and inside elevators)
- Website information to staff/visitors
- Scripted messages placed on the main WCH and program lines to remind patients/visitors of FF organization
5.7 Sample Staff and New Employee Orientation Presentation

Management needs to inform current staff about the upcoming phasing-in of a non-voluntary fragrance free policy. This has been accomplished successfully by offering a rotating live power point presentation or a webcast with plenty of time for discussion, questions and answers during and at the conclusion of the presentation.

From the date of implementation of the corporate policy, all new employees should receive mandatory orientation, either via live presentation or webcast.

The Ontario Environmental Health Clinic’s Community Outreach Coordinator at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto developed an orientation presentation entitled “WCH Fragrance-free Policy”. This presentation may be used by other organizations as long as the following recognition is included: “Provided by the Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital”.

The presentation PowerPoint is available on the Coalition website at:
WCH Fragrance-free Policy
Staff Orientation
Nancy Bradshaw
Community Outreach Coordinator
Environmental Health Clinic
March 2010

Background Information

WCH Environmental Health Clinic is the only academically-affiliated, provincially-funded clinic in Ontario that addresses environmental sensitivities.

Having environmental sensitivities has been designated a disability protected by Canadian and Ontario Human Rights legislation and policies.

All hospitals have an obligation to protect patients, ensuring they don’t become ill when they seek and receive care.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY

80 – 90 percent of our time is spent indoors
Indoor air is 2 – 5 times more polluted than outdoor air
Fragrances are the most obvious indoor air pollutant 2nd to tobacco smoke

Common sources of Fragrance in Healthcare

Staff and visitors who are wearing perfume, cologne or aftershave; scented cosmetics, skin lotions or hair products
Scented cleaning products, floor wax, paint
Healthcare-specific chemical emissions: medications; chemicals used in radiology, pathology, endoscopy and laboratory; adhesives; and cleaning and sterilization of surgical and medical instruments (i.e. aldehydes).

Chemical components of Perfumes and Fragrance

Up to 4,000 ingredients in manufacture of fragrances
Up to 500 ingredients in a single perfume
95% are petroleum-based volatile organic compounds (VOCs), many known to be respiratory irritants/sensitizers
Fixatives (e.g. phthalates) often used to aid persistence of the scent- known endocrine disruptors
Some ingredients have been linked with cancer, birth defects and neurotoxic effects at higher exposure levels

Common Symptoms Linked with Perfume Exposure

Symptom Presentation with Exposure

Rash
Watery eyes
Difficulty concentrating
Dizziness
Runny, stuffy nose, sinus
“Groggy” or “spacey” feeling
Headaches
Fatigue
Wheezing, shortness of breath
Sensitivity to Fragrances

- Once sensitivity develops, symptoms occur with each subsequent exposure, even at low levels.
- Often difficult to determine which chemical(s) are involved.
- Severity of symptoms varies from one individual to another.

Sensitivities to Fragrances

Canada
- Approximately 1/3 of the Canadian population is bothered by fragrances (complaint of symptoms from exposure) (Sears, M. Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2007)

United States
- 16 – 33% of U.S. population “especially sensitive” to chemicals, including perfume (Sid, 1996; 1998; Moga, 1996)
- 30% of US population finds fragrance on others irritating (adverse reactions) (Carena, S.R. and Stierman, A.C., 2006, 2009)

Sensitivities to Fragrances

Europe
- Danish study ~42% of the population surveyed had at least one eye or airway symptom associated with perfume exposure (Ebeling, J. et al., 2008)

Most Vulnerable?

- Asthmatics
- Allergic or “sensitized” – i.e. contact allergy
- Women and unborn babies
- Children – developing, active, eat, drink and breathe more per kg. body weight than adults

Asthma Facts

- Asthma affects approximately 3 million Canadians.
- In Canada, there are 146,000 emergency room visits from asthma attacks annually.
- Asthma is the leading cause of absenteeism from school and the third leading cause of work loss.
- Worldwide, the economic losses associated with asthma exceed those of TB and AIDS combined (Asthma Society of Canada, 2005)

Asthma and Perfumes

- Asthmatics are more severely bothered by perfume exposure than non-asthmatics (Ebeling, J., 2003)
- Placebo-controlled studies have shown that asthma symptoms can be provoked by perfume (Högstedt E., Loshagen, O., 1994; and Högstedt, Bengtsson, U. and Loshagen, 1999).
- Case report: health care worker, no hx of asthma or reactions to fragrances, experienced anaphylactic reaction when sprayed in the face with perfume, and continued to need oral bronchodilator at 2 month follow-up (Lissenger, J.E., 2001).
Asthma and Perfumes

- Perfumes are a recognized trigger of asthma and work-related asthma (including healthcare workers) (Hecater, et al., 2005; Hennesberger, IN., 2007; The Lung Association, Ontario, 2009)

Multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) Environmental sensitivities (ES)

- Symptoms occur with repeated chemical exposure
- The condition is chronic
- Low levels of exposure manifest symptoms
- Symptoms improve when irritants are removed
- Responses occur to chemically unrelated substances
- Symptoms involve multiple organ systems
- Neurological symptoms most common:
  - Having a stronger sense of smell than others
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Feeling dull or grumpy
  - Feeling “squares”

Prevalence of MCS/ES

Canada

- 2.4% (~643,000) of population reported diagnosis
- 3.4% women (~2.5 x more prevalent in women than men) (Glick, J, Redoubt S. Health Reports, 18:1, Feb. 2007 - Statistics Canada 2010-2011)
- 3.6% of all Canadian nurses experience chemical sensitivities (The 2005 National Survey of the Work and Health of Nurses)

United States

- 3-6% of population reported diagnosis by a physician (Sears, M.E., Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2007)

Environmental Sensitivities: Legal Requirements

- ES is a disability covered by Canadian and provincial Human Rights Legislation*
- Diagnosed individuals must be accommodated in the workplace
- Purpose: To prevent injuries/illnesses, reduce costs and health/safety risks

Why Fragrance Free?

1. Improves work environment
   - Health and Safety (indoor air quality)
   - Equal access
   - Enhanced morale
2. Protects patients and staff
3. Decreases absenteeism and improves productivity
4. Links to organization’s Mission and Values
   - Respect
   - Equity

What Can we Do?

- It is as simple as asking our community to:
  - NOT wear perfume, cologne or scented aftershave products
  - NOT wear scented products (lotions, antiperspirants/deodorants, creams etc.)
  - LOOK for products labelled “fragrance-free”
  - USE scent-free detergents and fabric softeners
**Fragrance Free Implementation Kit for Health Care Facilities**

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**What can You Do?**

- **Do not wear to Work**
  - Perfume
  - Cologne
  - Scented aftershave
  - Scented hairspray, mousse, gel, putty, oils
  - Scented creams, lotions, sunscreens
  - Scented deodorant/antiperspirant
  - Scented laundry products

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**What Can You Do?**

- Read labels - avoid products with fragrance in the ingredient list
- Try different products, to see what works best for you
- Start with the most accessible and least expensive alternatives
- Ongoing education for visitors, staff and patients

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**Corporate Initiatives**

- Fragrance free education – public places
- Corporate signage – fragrance free (elevator banks, wait areas, lobby and inside elevators)
- Website information to staff/visitors
- Scripted messages placed on the main WCH and program lines to remind patients/visitors of FF organisation

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**Corporate Initiatives**

- FAQ's for patients/staff (coming soon)
- Staff forums to increase awareness
- Webcast available for staff to view in future
- Ongoing review of corporate policy
- Managers may use this presentation for their staff as an education tool

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**Resources**

**Fragrance-Free**

- We Share the Air: Dalhousie University [http://environmentalhealth.dal.ca/health_1589.html](http://environmentalhealth.dal.ca/health_1589.html)
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety [www.ccohs.ca/cehws/fragrance/frag_free.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/cehws/fragrance/frag_free.html)
- Fragrance Products Information Network [www.ffmpeg.org](http://www.ffmpeg.org)

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**Resources**

**Environmental Health and MCS/ES**

- Women's Health Matters – Environmental Health Centre [www.womenshealthmatters.ca/centres/environmental/index.html](http://www.womenshealthmatters.ca/centres/environmental/index.html)
- Environmental Health Association of Ontario [http://chaontario.ca](http://chaontario.ca)
- Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia [www.environmentalhealth.ca](http://www.environmentalhealth.ca)
Resources

Accommodation for ES/MCS

References/Bibliography

References
- The Lung Association, Ontario Division. All about Asthma Triggers, 2009.
6. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

6.1 Peter Lougheed Centre, Alberta Health Services
Most of the frequently asked questions have been addressed by the Peter Lougheed Centre on their webpage, entitled “Scent-free Campaign- Q&A” (Please see Section 4.3.3).

6.2 Ontario Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital, Toronto
Some remaining Q’s & As have been noted by the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital as follows. These Q’s & A’s may be used by other organizations as long as the following recognition is included: Provided by the Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital.

1. What is a fragrance?
Fragrances are mixtures of often hundreds of different chemicals designed to have a particular scent. Most of the chemicals in fragrances are volatile, which means that the chemicals are emitted or given off into the air over time. The materials used to make fragrances may be man-made, natural or both. However, most modern fragrances contain mostly man-made petroleum-based chemicals.

Perfumes are considered the most concentrated form of fragrance. A single perfume may contain close to 500 different chemicals. Some of the chemicals in a perfume or other fragrance may be known respiratory sensitizers (i.e. may cause respiratory symptoms in some people, such as coughing, sneezing, wheezing and/or shortness of breath). Other chemicals in fragrances can affect the nervous system and may cause headaches, dizziness, fatigue and/or grogginess in some people.

2. How common is it that people actually develop symptoms when they are exposed to perfumes?
Approximately one-third of Canadians complain of symptoms when they are exposed to perfumes, fragrances and other scented products. This includes people with environmental sensitivities, allergies, asthma and other respiratory disorders.

3. What are the symptoms that people may experience when exposed to fragrance?
The symptoms from exposure to fragrance vary from person to person. They also vary in the degree of severity – from mildly irritating to temporarily disabling, although the symptoms may not clear if a person is continually being exposed, which can lead to prolonged disability. Rarely, a person may even experience an anaphylactic episode upon exposure to fragrance.

The most common symptoms associated with exposure to fragrance are:
- Rash
- Watery eyes
- Runny, stuffy nose/sinuses
- Wheeze, cough, shortness of breath (asthma symptoms)
- Dizziness
- Headache
• Grogginess/difficulty concentrating
• Fatigue

4. Are people only affected by “strong” scents, and so more lightly applied, milder or ‘natural’ scents would be acceptable?

Unfortunately, what bothers one person only when applied “strongly” can bother another to the point of incapacity even if applied only lightly. People’s vulnerability to health effects vary greatly in degree, and different ingredients in different fragrances/scents affect different people differently. This is why “no scents is good sense” (Marsh, 1998).

5. Where is the scientific data to back up the policy?

Many references from reputable and peer-reviewed sources are appended to this kit, and are included in the final four slides of the Sample Management Presentation in Section 5.6, entitled “Healthcare and Fragrances, Scents and Sensitivities”.

6. How can you make the Hospital completely fragrance-free? Is this possible?

It is not possible to ensure that any public building is completely fragrance-free, as some people that are not familiar with this policy may come into the hospital wearing a fragrance. In addition, there may be some mild fragrances/scents from medications and other products used within the hospital, even though we purchase products with no fragrance, whenever possible.

Our goal is to minimize people’s exposure to fragrances within the hospital to the greatest degree possible. One of the primary ways that we can reduce exposure to fragrances at WCH is by asking that staff, volunteers, doctors and students working within the hospital refrain from wearing perfume, cologne and scented personal care products while at WCH.

7. How can we ensure that patients and visitors do not wear fragrances to the hospital?

Each department should note on their voicemail message that Women’s College Hospital is fragrance-free, therefore patients and visitors should avoid the wearing of perfume, cologne and scented personal care products when coming into WCH.

When booking patient appointments, the patient should be advised of the policy and the restrictions about the wearing of perfumes, colognes and other scented personal care products to their appointment.

In addition, each department should have visible signage in their intake and waiting areas re: the fragrance-free policy.
7. Continuing Steps

7.1 The ‘Living Kit’
Continuing steps are needed to ensure effective ongoing protection of the air quality in health care facilities and occupants’ health. Tips to keep your Fragrance Free Program/Policy ‘fresh’, as noted in the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic Sample Management Presentation (Section 5.6). include providing ongoing education through articles in newsletters, posting Questions and Answers on the corporate website, providing examples of ‘success stories’ at “health and safety days”, and having a designated person or committee that can answer questions or concerns as they arise or bring them to the Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care listserv for discussion amongst Coalition members.

Some remaining questions and potential answers have been brought forward by the Ontario Environmental Health Clinic at Women’s College Hospital, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, and McMaster University.

7.2 Questions and Potential Answers from Ontario Environmental Health Clinic, Women’s College Hospital

7.2.1 What should I do if a patient is wearing a fragrance that is causing symptoms in another patient or a staff member?

First, remove the person experiencing the symptoms into a “clean” area (i.e. away from the source of the fragrance). Further steps may be necessary to remediate the person’s symptoms, depending on their type and severity (e.g. oxygen by mask or nasal prongs).

At the discretion of the departmental Manager, the individual wearing the offending fragrance may be asked to wash the fragrance off (i.e. from wrists or neck) in the closest washroom. If the scent is on his or her clothes, a hospital gown may be supplied along with an impermeable bag to store the clothes for the duration of the visit. Alternatively, the patient may decide to re-schedule. Rarely, if the offending fragrance cannot be washed off (e.g. it is in the hair), or is permeating underclothes, the Manager may have to ask the patient to re-schedule. It is important to be polite. You may explain that the hospital has a fragrance-free policy and the fragrance that the offender is wearing has caused symptoms in another patient (or staff person) who has allergies or sensitivities to fragrance.

7.2.2 What should I do if a co-worker is wearing a fragrance?

If a co-worker, other staff or volunteer at WCH is wearing a fragrance, you may politely remind them that WCH has a fragrance-free policy. Some people may become offended, so tactfully explain that personal fragrances can cause symptoms in people with asthma, allergies and environmental sensitivities, and can persist in any rooms the staff person enters. Remind the person that “it’s not the smell – it’s the chemicals”.

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If you are not comfortable speaking directly to other staff about fragrance he/she is wearing, you may approach the departmental Manager. The Manager can remind the staff member about the policy, explaining the reasons for the policy and reviewing products that are acceptable. The Manager may also decide to remind all staff about the policy, the reasons for the policy and acceptable fragrance-free products to be worn and used within the hospital.

If you are experiencing symptoms related to fragrance exposure from another staff member, particularly if this is an ongoing issue and/or your symptoms are serious, you should fill in an incident report and speak to your Manager. You should also visit the Occupational Health Department and speak to one of the nurses about the exposure and your symptoms.

7.2.3 What happens if a person and/or family member/friend arrives at the Emergency Department wearing fragrance?

Obviously, in an urgent situation, patients cannot be asked in advance not to wear fragrances. It would be helpful, if able, to place that patient and family member/friend as far away from others in the waiting area as soon as possible.

If someone in the Emergency Department is inadvertently exposed to a person’s scent and develops symptoms, the affected person should be moved to a ‘clean room’ (i.e. fragrance/scent-free) as soon as possible.

7.3 Question and Potential Answer from Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has included the following question on its webpage “Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace” at: www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html (last updated May 6, 2010). Note: The EHI encourages the use of the term ‘Fragrance-free’ rather than ‘Scent-free’.

7.3.1 “Are there alternatives to a fragrance-free policy?”
Try to identify the exact source of the problem, if possible. Reduce all emissions from building materials, cleaning products, etc.

Maintain good indoor air quality. Ensure that air is being replaced with fresh air, and that scents are not simply being recycled throughout the building.
If the source is an employee, ask the person to not wear or use scented products.”
7.4 Question and Potential Answer from McMaster University

7.4.1 How can we be efficient in maintaining an optimum fragrance-free program and policy?

“A log of scent-related complaint/issue events should be developed and maintained by Risk Management Support group, to act as a tool to assist in future response to similar concerns (e.g., scenario, response, recommendations and outcome). Managers are encouraged to support, and contribute to, this process.”


8. Resources

8.1 Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care
Canadian Coalition for Green Health Care: www.greenhealthcare.ca;
Canadian Journal of Green Health Care: http://www.nxtbook.com/dawson/marketzone/ghc_201009

8.2 Fragrance-free Information
• Guide to Less Toxic Products www.lesstoxicguide.ca/
• We Share the Air: Dalhousie University
  http://environmentalhealthandsafetyoffice.dal.ca/radiatio_1589.html
• The Canadian Lung Association http://lung.ca/protect-protegez/pollution-pollution/indoor-interieur/scents-parfums_e.php
• Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
  www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html
• David Suzuki Foundation. Fragrance and parfum
  http://www.davidsuzuki.org/issues/health/science/toxics/fragrance-and-parfum

8.3 Toxicology
• Toxnet- Toxicology Data Network, United States National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health

8.4 Environmental Health and multiple chemical sensitivities/environmental sensitivities (MCS/ES)
• Women’s Health Matters – Environmental Health Centre
  www.womenshealthmatters.ca/centres/environmental/index.html
• Environmental Health Association of Ontario http://ehaontario.ca/
• Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia www.environmentalhealth.ca/
• Public Service Alliance of Canada POLICY STATEMENT ON SCENT-FREE ENVIRONMENTS (Chemical Sensitivities - Environmental Disabilities) Includes the PSAC Awareness Kit on Scent-Free Environments, January 2006 http://psac.com/documents/what/scent-free-kit-feb2006-e.pdf
8.5 Accommodation for MCS/ES


8.6 References/Bibliography


