



## **Scent Free Guideline**

With this guideline we are increasing the awareness of the University of Winnipeg community regarding 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 University of Winnipeg is committed to a safe and healthy environment for faculty, staff, students and the larger community.

We are asking for voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment in all University of Winnipeg buildings and off campus locations occupied by faculty, staff, and students. And we are providing the steps for responding to scented-related issues. We encourage avoiding or reducing the use of fragranced products and to replace them with unscented alternatives. This is a request to voluntarily refrain from chemical based-scented products, not a ban on scented products.

### **What is the problem with scents?**

Exposure to perfumes and other products can trigger serious health reactions 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, malaise, confusion, loss of appetite, depression, anxiety, numbness, upper respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, difficulty concentration and /or skin irritation.

Although, we generally think that it is a personal choice to use scented products; however, by their very nature they are shared. Fragrance chemicals vapourize in the air and are easily inhaled by those around us.

### **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:*** (e.g. scented household and industrial cleaning products, air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, facial tissues, etc).

***Products brought into University buildings:*** (e.g. second hand smoke, engine exhausts, pollen, etc.)

### **Why does the University of Winnipeg 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 can cause a short-term reaction. Rather than ask all employees to eliminate all scented products, try to identify only those individuals whose use of scent 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 if I am approached about a scented product I am wearing?**

Do not take offence – 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 you 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 about it?**

Be considerate of those who are sensitive to scented products.

Be aware of the types of products that you use that are scented. This also includes laundry and cleaning products that are scented.

If you do use scented products, use them sparingly. A general guideline for scented products is that the scent should not be detectable more than an arm's length away from you. Do not apply scented products in a public area.

### **What can I do when a co-worker in my department is wearing a scented product that is causing problems?**

Approach your co-worker 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 the types of exposure that improve or worsen these symptoms.

Consult with your physician.

Consult the resources listed in this bulletin for further information and/or assistance.

### **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 make sure 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, try to assess the nature and extent of the concern. Some sample questions that may assist you in isolating a possible cause are:

- How often does the discomfort arise?

- Does the 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 the primary cause, of the employee's signs and symptoms, although that may be the initial perception. Other factors could be:

- Poor indoor air quality
- The time of year (during 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 the Vice-President (Human Resources, Audit and Sustainability).

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

Recognizing that chemicals, including scented chemicals, can negatively impact indoor air quality, the University 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 laboratories, cleaning materials, and building materials.
- Target harmful chemicals and contaminants and implement controls to effectively prevent or minimize their release into the general air as a result of building, maintenance, custodial, research and teaching activities.
- Support the best possible air quality practicably attainable, by means of proper ventilation, peak performance and proper maintenance of building mechanical ventilation systems.

### **University Resource**

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## **Use Good Sense with Scents!**