

# Making Sense of Scent-Free Workplaces

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# Outline

- What is meant by scents and “scent-free”
- Reported health effects
- How to recognize if scents are an issue in your workplace
- Accommodating scent sensitivities, including implementation of a scent-free policy

# What is a scent?

Scents are a mixture of natural and man-made chemicals.

- A typical fragrance can have between 100 to 350 ingredients.
- The problem is usually the chemicals that produce the smell

(The Lung Association of Canada)

# What is a scent?

Scents come from products such as:

- Perfume / colognes
- Make up / cosmetics
- Shampoo / conditioner
- Deodorant
- Air fresheners
- Cleaning products

# Is it really scent free?

## **“Fragrance Free or Unscented**

This means that no fragrances have been added to the cosmetic product, or that a masking agent has been added to hide the scents from the other ingredients in the cosmetic. Some products labelled fragrance-free may actually contain "fragrance" or "parfum" on the list of ingredients.”

(Health Canada)

# Labelling Requirements

## Cosmetics

- Used in cleansing, improving or altering your complexion, skin, hair or teeth
- All ingredients must be listed

## Consumer products

- Cleaners, air fresheners, etc.
- Labelled for “immediate” hazards only



Toxic



Flammable



Corrosive



Explosive

# Health concerns

## Range of symptoms

- Headaches
- Dizziness, lightheaded
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Shortness of breath
- Upper respiratory symptoms
- Skin irritation
- Trigger for allergic or asthmatic patients

# On one side...

- There are no diagnostic tests
  - Not the same as an allergy to a protein (e.g., peanuts or cat dander) that can be easily tested
- Individual responses can vary greatly

(Canadian Medical Association Journal, April 2011)



# On the other side...

- Environmental sensitivities are recognized by the Canadian Human Rights Act as a disability
- Canadian Human Rights Commission encourages employers to proactively address issues and to accommodate



# Is it an issue at your workplace?

Indicators include:

- Employee with specific concerns
- Increase in reports of symptoms (especially after a change in products)
- Employees are asking for a policy

# What can a workplace do?

## Quick Poll:

Does your workplace restrict scented products?

Yes

Informally, yes

No

# Approaches

Three main approaches:

- Case-by-case
- “Be Courteous”  
Option
- Workplace wide  
policy



# Case-by-Case

- Work with the person reporting the sensitivity
  - Many times, they know what products they are sensitive to and can offer solutions
- Discontinue use of the product (e.g., air freshener)
- May be able to substitute for a different product (e.g., floor cleaner)

# Case-by-Case

When another person's fragrance/etc. is identified:

- Explain the situation factually
- Ask for courtesy
  - Alternative fragrances may be okay
- “Arm’s length” / 1 metre circle

# “Be Courteous” Approach

Explain that due to allergies (for example), employees are being asked to restrict their use of scented products.

- More of a request than an outright ban
- Decide on the level of action and enforcement

# “Be Courteous” Approach

Show that the workplace is also taking steps

- Reduce emissions from building materials, cleaning products and other sources
- Maintain good indoor air quality (ventilation)





# “Be Courteous”

## Additional Information

- Posters
- Orientation / Training
- General information sessions
  - Help from outside organizations such as the Lung Association

# Policy Approach

Make the previous steps more formal

- Assign a person to oversee the development and/or organize a committee
  - Similar structure to a joint health and safety committee (or it could be handled by the HS committee)
- Get management commitment

# Survey



- Survey the workforce
  - Ask about concerns
  - Listen to feedback
  - Collect suggestions for action
  - Be prepared to respond or act

# Implementation

- Explain the policy
  - In writing
  - Have training sessions
  - Help people understand their role
- Document
  - Post policy
  - State implications of non-compliance
- Make it universal
  - Applies to visitors, outside staff, etc.

# Launch policy

- Formally launch your scent-free or scent-reduced policy in your workplace.
  - Post a sign at the entranceways of your workplace to remind visitors and employees that the building or office is "scent-free", and to be aware that fragrances can aggravate or cause health issues for people with sensitivities or other health conditions.

# Review

- Let everyone know the policy will be reviewed regularly
  - Can change because of experience or new knowledge



# Last thoughts

Would you accept a scent-reduced or scent-free policy in your workplace?

- Yes, a full policy is the way to go
- Yes, but either the “courteous” or case-by-case approach would be best
- No

# Ways CCOHS can help

## OSH Answers

- fact sheet

[http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent\\_free.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html)

The screenshot shows the CCOHS website interface. At the top, there are logos for the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and the Canadian government. Below the header is a navigation menu with links for Français, Home, Contact Us, Help, Search, and canada.gc.ca. The main content area is titled '> Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace' and includes a sidebar with a table of contents. The table of contents lists various topics such as 'About CCOHS', 'Newsroom', 'Products & Services', 'Web Information Service', 'OSH Answers', 'Health & Safety Programs', 'Accident Investigation', 'Basic OHS Program Elements', 'Confined Space - Introduction', 'Confined Space - Program', 'Effective Workplace Inspections', 'Emergency Management Checklist', 'Emergency Planning', 'Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)', 'Employee Orientation Checklist', 'Ergonomic Patient Handling - Policy Guidelines', 'First Aid - General', and 'Guide to Writing an OHS Policy Statement'. The main content area contains several sections of text, including 'What is meant by "scent-free"?' and 'Can scents cause health problems?'. The 'What is meant by "scent-free"?' section explains that scents are smells or odours from cosmetics and other products, and that there is no exact definition for "scent-free". The 'Can scents cause health problems?' section is partially visible at the bottom of the page.

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CCOHS > Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace

Ask a Question  
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**What is meant by "scent-free"?**  
**Can scents cause health problems?**  
**What types of products contain scents?**  
**I have read that there are carcinogens in fragrances. Is this true?**  
**Are there any labeling requirements for products or cosmetics?**  
**Are there laws in Canada that cover environmental sensitivities?**  
**What steps should I take when implementing a scent-free policy in the workplace?**  
**What is an example of a policy?**  
**What should the 'posted notice' say?**  
**What are sample questions for an employee survey?**  
**Are there alternatives to a scent-free policy?**

**What is meant by "scent-free"?**

When we talk about "scents", we usually mean the smells or odours from cosmetics (perfume, make-up, shampoo, deodorant, etc.) or from other products such as air fresheners, cleaners, etc.

Unfortunately, there is no exact definition for "scent-free", "fragrance-free" or "unscented". Products labelled as "unscented" may actually contain ingredients that are used to mask or hide the smell of other ingredients. According to Health Canada, when labelling cosmetics, the following terms are used:

**Fragrance Free or Unscented** - This means that there have been no fragrances added to the cosmetic product, or that a masking agent has been added in order to hide the scents from the other ingredients in the cosmetic.

While it is important to be aware of the lack of consistency when these terms are used by various manufacturers, the terms can still be a rough guideline when choosing products.

**Can scents cause health problems?**



# Ways CCOHS can help



## Posters

- free PDF download
- order a 16"x 25", full colour

## Buttons

- By order only



# Thank You



**Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety**

Inquiries and Client Services

1-800-668-4284

[www.ccohs.ca](http://www.ccohs.ca)