Making Sense of Scent-Free Workplaces

Jan Chappel, MHSc Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)



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





Flammable







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 scentreduced 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-bycase approach would be best
- No

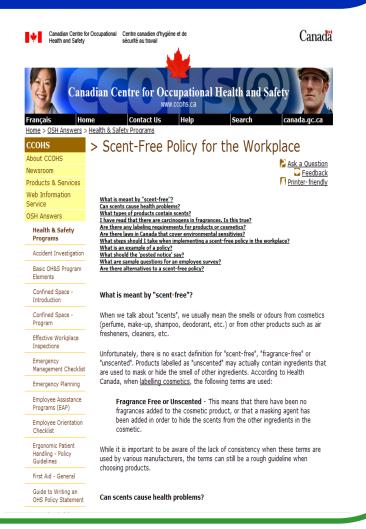


Ways CCOHS can help

OSH Answers

fact sheet

http://www.ccohs.ca/ oshanswers/ hsprograms/ scent free.html





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

