



## Scent Safety Guidelines

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### Scope

The University of Victoria is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for employees, students, and visitors. Scented products have the potential to impact the health of some individuals. The university endeavours to control exposure to scented products by increasing awareness and encouraging individuals to avoid the use of scented products in the workplace.

### Purpose

To ensure the health and well-being of employees, students, and visitors on campus by minimizing, and where possible, eliminating exposure to scented products.

### Health Symptoms

Exposure to scented products may adversely affect a person's health. Over time, an individual may become sensitized to a product where a physical reaction may occur, even at a very low concentration. This chemical sensitization may be in part due to an allergy to one or several ingredients of the scented product. People with asthma and other respiratory conditions may also have a higher sensitivity to scented products and experience a wide range of health symptoms.

These symptoms may include \*:

- Migraines, headaches
- Weakness
- Upper respiratory irritation
- Nausea
- Malaise
- Sinus congestion
- Insomnia
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness, light-headedness
- Confusion
- Skin irritation
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty with concentration

\*(CCOHS, 2024)

### Product Labelling

When choosing products that are labelled "scent-free" it is important to keep in mind that there is no consistent definition for this term, and products may still contain chemical ingredients to hide the smell of other ingredients. Health Canada advises, as a general guideline, that products which are labelled "fragrance-free" or "unscented" are typically odourless, or nearly odourless, and contain no odour masking ingredients.



## **Scented Product Categories**

Personal products: Include, but are not limited to cosmetics, perfumes, colognes, after-shave, oils, deodorant, shampoo/conditioners, hair spray, lotions, and creams.

Non-personal products: Include, but are not limited to air fresheners, marker pens, deodorizers, potpourri, candles, household cleaning products, or other products with a distinct scent or fragrance.

## **Problem Resolution**

The following approaches should address most situations, keeping in mind that the primary objective is to identify the source and extent of the concern and seek a solution that best fits the circumstances. The concern may be from an apparent scented product, relate to a discomfort, annoyance issue, or even a severe physical reaction.

### **1. Identify the source of the concern by asking the following questions:**

- How often does the discomfort arise?
- Is the source of the scented product known?
- Is there a specific time of day or location in the workplace?
- Does the discomfort arise only at work or elsewhere as well?

This information can assist in isolating a possible cause and assist in determining if it is a personal or non-personal product.

### **2. Personal Product Issue**

If general indoor air quality (e.g., inadequate ventilation) or other possible causes have been ruled out (such as flu or hay fever season) and a personal scented product appears to be the source of the discomfort/concern, supervisors are encouraged to seek local workplace co-operation between employees. If it is clear the issue is specific to a particular personal scented product (e.g., perfume) and the concern appears genuine and sincere, seek the cooperation of the person wearing the personal scented product to refrain from using the product.

If the concern persists and employee co-operation is not obtained regarding use of the personal scented product, then the supervisor needs to determine the impact on the workplace and the extent to which further intervention is required. In order to maintain good employee relations when responding to a concern, it is important to acknowledge and support the person(s) impacted.

Addressing the issue as an education and awareness process is generally appreciated by all employees. In some cases the solution may be a restriction on the use of personal scented products in that workplace. If that is the case, determine the extent of a restriction and how best to communicate this to other employees. In addition, signage should be posted in high traffic areas to discourage the use of scented products.



### **3. *Non-Personal Product Issue***

Where it has been identified that the source of discomfort may be associated with a non-personal product (e.g., scented cleaning solution, deodorizers, air fresheners), the university may have to adjust the use of these products. Any suggested changes to custodial services should be discussed with Facilities Management. Other non-personal product issues (e.g. office supplies, markers, plants, etc.) should be discussed within the unit and resolved seeking cooperation between employees and management.

#### **Additional Considerations for Employees with a Medical Condition or Disability**

For some employees adverse reactions to a scented product are a significant health and disability issue, and may cause a severe physical reaction that may require medical intervention. In these circumstances, consultation with Human Resources Work-Life Consulting is recommended to ensure the employer's response fits the medical circumstances of the individual.

If employee symptoms are severe and local interventions are not reducing the symptoms, request that the employee involve their doctor and contact Human Resources at 250-721-8085.

For questions with respect to the application of these Guidelines please contact Occupational Health, Safety & Environment at ohs@uvic.ca or 250-721-8971.

#### **References**

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

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

WorkSafeBC. Scent Safety in the Workplace. Health Policies, Section 1- Administration and General Practices. HEA 1-9. February 2010.

