

GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF PERFUMES AND SCENTED PRODUCTS

PURPOSE

University of Toronto Schools (“UTS”) is committed to a safe and healthy environment for faculty, staff, students, and visitors. This guideline is intended to:

1. Increase the awareness within the UTS community about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected.
2. Ask for the voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment.
3. Provide the steps for responding to scent-related issues.

OVERVIEW OF ISSUE

Exposure to perfumes and other scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities.

Fragrances are found in a wide range of products. Common scented products include perfume, cologne, aftershave, deodorant, soap, shampoo, hairspray, body-spray, makeup and powders. Examples of other products with added scents include air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, carpet deodorizers, facial tissues, and candles.

Within most environments, the use of fragrances is a personal choice; however, fragrance chemicals are by their very nature shared. The chemicals vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled by those around us. Today’s scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

Some of these fragrance chemicals are known to be skin sensitizers. Some are also respiratory tract irritants, and can trigger asthma and breathing difficulties. Asthmatics commonly cite fragrances as initiating or exacerbating their asthma. Fragrances are also implicated in vascular changes that can trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. Individuals with chemical sensitivities can experience symptoms at very low levels in the air, far below those known to cause harmful effects in the general population.

Susceptible individuals can experience a variety of symptoms, including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate. Although the mechanisms by which fragrance chemicals act to produce symptoms are not yet understood, the impact on all those affected can be quite severe, resulting in great difficulty in work and study activities.

GUIDELINE

This guideline is intended to raise the awareness within the UTS community about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected, namely staff, students parents and volunteers who work, study and spend time at UTS. ***Information on scent awareness will be disseminated through posters, the UTS website, and information bulletins prior to school events*** (e.g. Parent Teachers Interviews, School Concerts...).

UTS encourages avoiding or reducing the use of fragranced products or replacing them with unscented alternatives. The guidelines outlined in this policy are not an outright ban on scented products, it is a call for voluntary replacement of scented products with non-scented alternatives.

“Scents” in this Policy means the smells or odours from cosmetics such as perfumes, make-up, shampoos, deodorants, colognes etc. or from other products such as air fresheners, cleaners, detergents, etc.

Working Towards A Scent-Reduced Environment

In order to protect those individuals with fragrance sensitivities and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities, UTS is asking for voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment. Teachers, staff, students, parents, alumni and other visitors are strongly encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of fragranced products, and to replace them with unscented alternatives. **This is a request to voluntarily refrain from chemical-based scented products, and not a ban on scented products.**

What is UTS doing about it?

Recognizing that chemicals, including fragrance chemicals, can negatively impact on indoor air quality, UTS will strive to:

- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including fragrance chemicals.
- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products in laboratories and cleaning 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 and teaching activities.
- Support the best possible air quality practicably attainable, by means of proper ventilation and proper maintenance of building mechanical ventilation systems.
- Develop proper information and implement necessary training to promote the above to the UTS community.

What can you do to help?

- **Be considerate** of those who are sensitive to fragrance chemicals.
- **Avoid** using scented products in the workplace; instead, use scent-free alternatives.
- If you must use a fragrance or 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 on school grounds.
- **Do not** use products (e.g. air fresheners or potpourris) that give off chemical-based scents in your work area.
- As much as possible, **avoid using laundry products or cleaning agents that are scented.** Try to remember to air out dry cleaned clothing before wearing.

What can you do if you are sensitive to fragrance chemicals?

- If you feel you can do so comfortably, approach the scented individual and let them know how you react to fragrances. Be specific about the types of physical reactions you have (e.g. asthma attacks, migraines, shortness of breath). Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for their understanding and cooperation. Many people are unaware of the potential health effects of fragrance chemicals.
- Inform your supervisor, an administrator or Human Resources of your sensitivities, your symptoms, and the types of exposures that improve or worsen these symptoms. Ask them to assist in finding a solution to your situation. As an employee, you may ask your supervisor, the administrator or Human Resources, to discuss this matter with the individual involved or with the group of employees. As a student, you can ask your teacher to discuss the issue with the class and ask for their cooperation in not using scented products.
- Consult with your physician about your symptoms.
- Consult the resources listed in this guideline for further information or assistance.

What can you do as a Supervisor?

If an individual in your work area or classroom is adversely affected by scented products:

- Listen to the person with respect and civility.
- Clarify the issue. Ask the individual to describe their health effects, the factors that make the problem better or worse, and the actions they are taking to deal with it.
- Investigate the issue and use good judgment and consideration to provide a fair, uniform and timely resolution.
- Discuss the issue with your staff or students in an open and non-threatening manner. Inform them of the health concerns that have arisen as a result of the use of scented products in the workplace. You may choose to have this discussion with an individual or an entire group, whichever is appropriate to the situation.

- Request everyone's cooperation and understanding to voluntarily avoid the use of scented products in the area. Discuss the benefits of a scent-free work area.
- Implement measures to reasonably accommodate those who are affected by scented products. Where employees are severely limited due to exposure to scented products, you may need to establish a fragrance-free zone. **Please contact Human Resources if you need to establish a fragrance-free zone.** For meetings held in enclosed rooms, you may need to send out notices to attendees informing them of the scent-free nature of the meeting.
- Consult with UTS Facilities regarding the adequacy of ventilation.
- Refer those issues which cannot be resolved locally to Human Resources.

What should you do if you're approached about the scented product you're wearing?

- If an individual or your supervisor informs you that the fragranced products that you use or wear are a problem and requests that you avoid using them, you may feel puzzled, hurt, annoyed, defensive or even insulted by the request. Understand that it is not about you as a person or about your choice of fragrance, but it is about the chemicals in the fragranced product. Do not discount the issue as ridiculous and unreasonable.
- Discuss the issue openly. Ask questions about the health impact on the person, the types of symptoms experienced, the factors which make the person's symptoms better or worse (e.g. fragrance type, amount used).
- Empathize with the individual. Work with cooperation and understanding towards a satisfactory resolution.