



CITY OF KINGSTON

SCENT SENSITIVITY PROGRAM

As part of our commitment to maintaining a safe, secure and clean working environment for our employees and visitors to our workplaces, the City of Kingston has developed guidelines that form the *Scent Sensitivity Program*. These guidelines will be updated as new information becomes available or at the very least every 12 months.

Since most people spend 80% to 90% of their time indoors, much of it at work, there is a clear need for a comfortable work environment. Although many social and organizational factors influence how people work in our buildings, it is the physical and particularly the chemical factors that many see as having a particularly negative effect on health. In order to protect those individuals with fragrance sensitivities and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities, the City of Kingston is asking for voluntary cooperation towards the implementation of a scent-reduced work environment.

What follows are scent sensitivity guidelines that staff and building operators/managers are strongly encouraged to read and implement at their workplace. The *Scent Sensitivity Program* encourages staff and building operators to avoid or reduce the use of fragranced cleaning or personal products and to replace them with unscented or scent-reduced alternatives. The *Scent Sensitivity Program* suggests voluntarily refrain from the use of chemical-based scented products and is not intended as an outright ban on scented products.

In keeping with City of Kingston values, the *Scent Sensitivity Program* encourages staff to be considerate of their co-workers and encourages them to refrain from using or wearing scented products while at work or prior to coming to work. Remember that co-workers are not just those in your immediate work area or section but every person who works in your building/workplace. Scents may linger in common spaces such as washrooms, stairwells, elevators, and meeting rooms long after you have left the space.

With respect to building cleaning, for the past few years, Corporate Services Facilities Management have been working in concert with several janitorial service providers and purchasing to implement an eco-friendly, reduced-scent cleaning program. Once finalized, this program will be cascaded out to all City of Kingston facilities where control of the cleaning program rests with City building operators/managers.

Although we do not have control over others who visit our facilities or the members of the public we serve, we have 'signed' our facilities to indicate that all City of Kingston workspaces are places that employ the guidelines of the *Scent Sensitivity Program*, the primary objective being the use of reduced scent products.

The Scent Sensitivity Program will:

- Provide a heightened awareness of the increasing issue of workplace sensitivity
- Communicate the potential symptoms and effects of chemical and fragrance sensitivities
- Help to create respect for the symptoms experienced by others with sensitivities
- Encourage scent-free or scent-reduced products to be used wherever possible
- Remind staff that we are seeking voluntary cooperation
- Provide staff with the appropriate steps for responding to scent-related issues
- Remind workers and visitors to our buildings that wherever possible scent-reduced products, including cleaning products, are used within City of Kingston facilities

The *Scent Sensitivity Program* will be phased in over the next three years as follows:

- City Hall, Portsmouth Olympic Harbour, Grand Theatre, and the Multiplex will implement the program by December 2008.
- All City-operated museums, arenas, and marinas will implement the program by December 2009.
- All other City buildings will implement the program by December 2010.

What is meant by “scent-free”, “fragrance-free” or “unscented”?

“Scents” usually means the smells or odors from cosmetics (perfume, makeup, shampoos, deodorant, and cleaning products including air fresheners, etc.). However, there is no exact definition of ‘scent-free’, ‘fragrance-free’ or ‘unscented’. The Lung Association suggests the following definition:

“A product that is fragrance-free is likely to be totally odorless”

A product labeled ‘scent-free’ could mean that no scent has been added to the chemicals already used to make it. Presently, the cosmetic industry uses the terms ‘fragrance-free’ and ‘unscented’ virtually without restriction. It is important to remember that some products that claim to be ‘scent-free’ may have only masked the scent by use of an additional chemical. Product labels will be reviewed carefully if using scented products around those who are sensitive. Generally speaking, if the word ‘fragrance’ or ‘flavour’ is listed in the ingredients, it is NOT ‘fragrance-free’.

What are fragrances?

People have been using perfumes for hundreds of years however fragrance sensitivity is a relatively new phenomenon. Before the 20th century, fragrances were extracted directly from plants and animals. Today, more than 80% to 90% of fragrance materials are synthetic compounds derived from various petrochemicals.

Fragrances are generally complex mixtures of chemicals formulated to have a specific or pleasant odor. The intensity of the odor and how long it lasts is not necessarily associated with the level of fragrance in a particular product. The fragrance portion of a product may vary from less than 1% to 30% percent of the product.

Formulations changed in the 1980s with the development of very strong synthetics that can be used at higher levels. In modern fragrance formulations, 3 to 5 materials may make up to 80% of the formula. These mixtures are powerful and tenacious when sprayed or applied.

Fragrance chemicals are volatile by nature, meaning they disperse into the air quickly and linger for a long time. The result is a complex mixture of chemicals that is constantly changing as it comes into contact with other substances. In indoor environments where air exchange may be poor, the problems are increased.

Why does the City of Kingston need a Scent Sensitivity Program?

On January 8, 2008, City Council endorsed a motion from the City's *Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC)* that reads:

WHEREAS environmental sensitivities (also known as Environmental Illness, Environmental Disease, or Multiple Chemical Sensitivities) can be debilitating and disabling; and

WHEREAS environmental sensitivities have been recognized as disabilities by the Canadian Human Rights Commission; and

WHEREAS sensitivity reactions can be triggered by scented products, cleaning products, detergents, paints, chemicals, smoke, pesticides, molds, etc.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee (MAAC) recommends that the City of Kingston adopts a no-scent policy when purchasing products; and that

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the City of Kingston take measures to inform the general public when scented products are being used in municipal buildings.

The expectation is that the City of Kingston will use its best efforts to mitigate the scent sensitivity problems experienced in the workplace. In addition the City of Kingston, where able, will post episodic cleaning information for both staff and visitors such that people can make an informed decision about when they visit a municipal building in which a chemical product, to which they are sensitive has been recently used.

What is the City of Kingston doing about Scent Sensitivity?

Recognizing that chemicals, including fragrance chemicals, can negatively impact on indoor air quality, the City of Kingston will strive to:

- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful cleaning products and building materials in City-owned/leased facilities.
- 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.
- Develop proper information and training to promote the above to the workplace community.
- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals including fragrance chemicals.
- Install portable signage in the vicinity of a workplace area where episodic chemicals are being used (carpet cleaning, etc.) by City staff or contractors which will inform the public of the presence of the chemicals.
- Install permanent signage/notices in conspicuous locations in all buildings indicating that the City is using its best efforts to reduce the introduction of chemicals into the workplace environment.

What types of products contain scents? Scents are included in a very large range of products including:

- shampoo and conditioners
- hairsprays
- deodorants
- colognes and aftershaves
- fragrances and perfumes
- lotions and creams
- potpourri
- industrial and household chemicals
- soaps
- cosmetics
- air fresheners and deodorizers
- oils
- some types of garbage bags
- manufactured products and materials
- cleaning products

What are the routes of transmission? Fragrance can enter the body through numerous routes such as:

Skin Absorption

Most cosmetics containing fragrance are directly applied to the skin such as perfumes and colognes which eventually enter the bloodstream. Fragrances have long been recognized as skin allergens and irritants. In the workplace, fragrances can be found in soaps, cleaners and other products which can cause skin problems such as dermatitis in fragrance-sensitive workers. A conservative estimate indicates that 1% to 2% of the general population has a skin allergy to fragrance.

Absorption through the Eyes

When sprayed into the air, scented products have the potential to remain suspended in the air for a long period of time. Should the droplets of the product come into direct contact with the eye, which has a very thin outside membrane; the chemical can be easily absorbed through this membrane into the blood supply beneath the surface of the eye.

Inhalation

The purpose of fragrance in a product is to impart odor to it. To be detected, odor must disperse into the air. From the air, the chemicals are inhaled into the airways and lungs and enter the bloodstream. Once in the bloodstream, they are distributed to other organs.

Ingestion

Ingestion is another route of exposure because many of the same materials are used as flavours in foods (i.e. lemon or strawberry-flavoured candy).

Olfactory Pathways (Sense of Smell)

Fragrances also go directly to the brain and the nervous system via the olfactory pathways. In general, fragranced products are recognized as respiratory irritants. Fragrances can induce or worsen respiratory problems such as asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, and allergies because of their irritant effect.

Can scents cause health problems?

When scented products have been the cause for adversely affecting a person's health, some or all of the following symptoms are reported:

- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea
- fatigue
- weakness
- insomnia
- malaise
- sneezing, coughing, wheezing and chest tightness
- shortness of breath
- hives
- upper respiratory symptoms

Are some people more vulnerable than others?

Many of the symptoms are reported to worsen when people spend much of the time indoors. Allergic and asthmatic patients report that certain odors, even in the smallest amounts, can trigger an attack. In addition, those persons with "*multiple chemical sensitivity*" may also be affected.

Other people have developed sensitivity to some of the ingredients in scented products. The severity of symptoms varies. Some people may experience mild irritation or discomfort while others experience serious effects in multiple body systems.

What is the difference between an allergy and sensitivity?

An '*allergy*' is a condition in which exposure to material prompts the body's immune system to react. It may cause respiratory, skin or mucus membrane symptoms from mild to very severe. Symptoms can be relieved by taking an anti-histamine medication.

'*Sensitivities*' to things such as scented products can cause the same type and severity of symptoms however there is no medication to relieve the symptoms and the only treatment is to avoid exposure.

Are there any labeling requirements for products or cosmetics?

As most products containing fragrances are considered "consumer products" they are excluded from the *Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHIMS)* and its provisions. This makes it difficult for individuals to pinpoint the specific chemicals that may be problematic to them and to determine their potential health effects. Consumer labels focus on immediate hazards such as corrosion (burns to skin/eyes), explosion, fire and poison. Only certain ingredients will be listed on the package or product. To find out all of the ingredients in the products, it may be necessary to contact the manufacturer directly.

What can you do to help?

You can adopt scent-reduced practices by limiting or, where possible, avoiding the use of perfumes, aftershaves, colognes and personal care products, and opting for '*fragrance-free*' or '*scent-free*' versions of such personal products. At the City of Kingston, we have adopted a scent-reduced approach to building cleaning. We insist that scent-reduced cleaning products are employed at the facilities over which we control the janitorial contract or retain in-house custodial staff.

Did you know?

One of the very best air fresheners is baking soda and one of the best household cleaners is white vinegar.

Do I need to stop using scented products?

The City of Kingston's *Scent Sensitivity Program* encourages employees to be considerate of their co-workers however it is not the intention of the program to dictate the personal use of a wide variety of products which contain manufactured scents. If you are interested in some of the fragrance-free products on the market, the *Nova Scotia Lung Association* has created an exhaustive list. The City of Kingston does not endorse the use of any particular product.

How do you deal with co-workers regarding scents?

If a co-worker is using a scented product that is affecting you, you may choose to discuss the issue with your co-worker directly, if you are comfortable in doing so. Approach your co-worker in a positive manner and share your concerns about the scented product being used. Express to your co-worker how this is causing you discomfort and affecting your health. In an atmosphere of understanding and cooperation, the issue will more likely be resolved.

If approaching your co-worker does not work, or if you choose not to discuss the situation directly with them, you may raise the issue with your supervisor. Your supervisor will immediately work toward resolving the situation in a way that is respectful of the feelings and dignity of all concerned. They may seek assistance from the Human Resources Occupational Health & Safety Coordinator. You should be prepared to provide clear information about your symptoms and concerns and explain what you have done in an attempt to resolve the concern. Your supervisor will respect your right to confidentiality and will exclude employee-identifying information in communications with other employees if you so wish.

The supervisor will inform your co-workers that concerns have been raised in their work area with respect to the use of scented products and remind your co-workers that individuals can be adversely affected by exposure to these products.

Each situation is likely to be unique and will be handled and responded to on an individual basis. When the source of the scent is a personal product, the supervisor will ask the employee to immediately refrain from wearing or using the product while at work or prior to coming to work. If the supervisor's direction is not followed by the employee, appropriate action may be taken.

What if a co-worker approaches you regarding your scent?

While you may initially feel surprised or taken aback, listen to your co-worker in a non-defensive way. Remember that the person is experiencing health-related symptoms and is not criticizing your choice of product(s) or personal taste. Be understanding and willing to reach a mutually agreed upon resolution.

What are the possible solutions?

Flexible work arrangements, alternate work locations and other possible solutions may be considered based on the particular needs of the affected employee. If, after consultation with the supervisor, it is mutually decided that it would be best for the affected employee to remove themselves from the workplace for the balance of the day, a supervisor may grant the leave without penalty. The supervisor will

immediately work toward identifying and arranging for the source of the scent to be removed. When the source of the scent is a personal product used by an employee, the supervisor will direct the employee to immediately refrain from using the product while at work. If the source of the scent is found to be a cleaning product, the supervisor will immediately contact Facilities Management who will respond using the *Scent Sensitivity Program* guidelines relative to janitorial cleaning products.

What is a 'scent-circle'?

You may have heard that is fine to wear scents as long as they remain within your '*scent-circle*' (within arm's length of you). The '*scent-circle*' is an idea which sounds good but does not work well in the real world. Have you ever stepped into an empty elevator, a hallway or room and been able to tell that the person before you had been wearing perfume or cologne?

As molecules of fragrance chemicals evaporate from your skin, they do not stay within an arm's length distance from you. They are picked up by the currents of air that constantly move around us and the fragrances are dispersed into the atmosphere we all breathe. Fragrances are volatile organic compounds and it's their nature to waft into the air. Even if you sat very still in one place, you could not keep a circle of air containing the fragrance close around you.

As well, given our '*open space/office design*' environment here at the City of Kingston, the idea that fragrance could be kept within your '*scent-circle*' is highly improbable.

How do I find 'scent-free' products?

Going scent-free may not be as difficult as it once was. Many brand name personal care items come in '*scent-free*', '*fragrance-free*' or '*unscented*' versions. Most of these types of products are available at your local grocery store or pharmacy and include a wide range of items from hair care, body lotions, deodorant, laundry and home cleaning products.

CONCLUSION

The City of Kingston asks for the support of staff in the implementation of the *Scent Sensitivity Program* that aims to keep exposure to chemicals in the workplace as low as possible. The City of Kingston's *Scent Sensitivity Program* addresses both the use of cleaning materials and personal care products by staff. With the support of staff, Occupational Health & Safety Committees, purchasing, facilities management and building operators/managers, we are confident that we will be able to increase awareness around scent sensitivity issues and encourage the replacement of scented products with scent-reduced alternatives where they are available.

As a consequence, we think that persuasion; education and cooperation will bring about the needed changes in personal behavior. In most cases, we expect such an approach will be more successful than one based upon regulation and enforcement. The City of Kingston believes that leadership on this issue is timely and will reflect positively on our public image relative to workplace health and wellness.

Resource Staff

Yvonne Holland, Acting Manager of Facilities
Jamie Brash, Supervisor, Facilities Maintenance
Brian Smith, Health & Safety Coordinator
Barry Kaplan, Accessibility Project Coordinator

Additional Resources

http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html

http://www.on.lung.ca/youlungs/asthma_triggers.html

<http://www.lung.ca/cando/workplace.html>

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ccdpc-cpcmc/crd-mrc/asthma>

http://www.lung.ca/protect-protegez/pollution-pollution/indoor-interieur/scents-parfums_e.php

<http://www.unbf.ca/its/policies/scentreduced.htm>

<http://www.socialwork.utoronto.ca/fsw/mswprogram/handbook/cultural.html>

http://www.pres.ednet.ns.ca/scent_free_policy.htm

<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/cms-filesystem-action?file=pdfs/safety/scent-free-guideline.pdf>

<http://www.ehs.utoronto.ca/Assets/ehs3/documents/Scents+Brochure+March+2006.pdf>