

## **Scent-Aware Guideline**

### **Purpose:**

This guideline is offered as a method of raising the awareness of all persons entering McMaster University buildings regarding the need to eliminate the use of scented products wherever possible as well as providing best practices for the management of scent-related complaints and concerns.

### **Scope:**

All McMaster University buildings and off campus locations occupied by staff, students and visitors.

### **Background Information:**

For the general population, exposure to scents is not typically problematic. However, from time-to-time, the presence of perfumes and other scented products can present indoor air quality concerns that may affect worker/occupant comfort. Furthermore, for a very small portion of the general population, scented products may present a risk of health hazard.

Individuals with pre-existing conditions such as chemical sensitivities or sensitizations, asthma or allergies, exposure to some odours can cause a range of ill health effects. Some reported symptoms include: headaches, dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, fatigue, weakness, insomnia, malaise, confusion, loss of appetite, depression, anxiety, numbness, upper respiratory symptoms, shortness of breath, difficulty with concentration, and/or skin irritation.

Scented products more commonly include the following:

- Personal hygiene products (e.g., shampoo, conditioner, hairsprays, deodorants, cologne, after-shaves, fragrances, perfumes, lotions, soaps, cosmetics and creams);
- Industrial and household chemicals and cleaners;
- Air fresheners (e.g., deodorizers, potpourri, oils and candles); and
- Various household products.

### **Raising the scent-awareness of our workplace:**

Employees, students, volunteers and visitors will be informed of this guideline through signs posted in buildings, website information, healthy workplace promotional materials, orientation and other training sessions, where applicable.

### **Minimizing the use of, and exposure to, scented products:**

1. Persons entering our facilities should be encouraged to use scent-free products.
2. Wherever practical, in our workplace, scent-free products should be used. The purchase and use of "unscented" products should be preferred over scented

- substitutes. This will involve the review of Material Safety Data Sheets for commercial products currently used and those intended for use as well as examination of product samples, to ensure that the ingredients are unscented.
3. Cleaning, maintenance, renovation, etc. with which an “atypical” odour is associated should be scheduled to occur at times of reduced occupancy, wherever possible. Occupants of the affected areas should be notified of the occurrence of such procedures or projects.

**Recommended response to Scent-related complaints or issues:**

1. While medical research has not established a certain cause-effect relationship between scent-exposure and disease, we do acknowledge that at times, exposure to scents can act as a trigger to symptomatic response. Therefore, we should choose to respect the symptoms reported by members of our workplace and occupants of our facilities. Communication with persons regarding their personal hygiene choices should be undertaken in a considerate and respectful manner. Every effort should be made to not offend any parties involved.
2. Scent-related complaints and issues will typically fall into one of two separate categories:
  - (a) Medically supported evidence of ill-health effects (either arising from or exacerbated by scents) provided; or
  - (b) Comfort- related concerns.
3. Concerns shall be reported to the supervisor of the area. The supervisor will make efforts to determine the category to which the complaint belongs.
4. The supervisor should speak with all parties involved in a tactful and respectful manner, in order to explain that the concern has been reported, noted and response is occurring. In the event that the scent concern is associated with another person, the supervisor will make an effort to discuss the scent-aware initiative of our workplace and request their participation in our attempts to achieve a scent-free work environment.
5. Considering the category into which the complaint belongs, the following action is advised:
  - (a) In the case of a substantiated medical concern,
    - a. Parties responsible for the scent will be informed of the situation (without disclosure of confidential medical information), and asked to support our initiative to be scent-free.
    - b. The supervisor should utilize the attached Worksheet to further facilitate a resolution.
    - c. In the case that scent-free cannot be achieved in the affected worker's environment, consideration should be given to the application of the McMaster University Policy and Procedure on Employment Accommodation.
  - (b) In the case of comfort-related concerns,
    - a. The supervisor will initiate an investigation using the attached Worksheet and may request the Risk Management Support Group conduct an indoor air quality investigation.
    - b. Parties responsible for the scent will be informed of the situation, any indoor air quality investigation and asked to support our initiative to be scent-free.
    - c. A JHSC member will be notified of any industrial hygiene testing.

- d. Any indoor air quality investigation will be handled in accordance with the McMaster University Building Indoor Air Quality Management Program (RMM#400).
- e. In the case that scent-free cannot be achieved in the affected workers environment, efforts should be made to explain the difference between comfort-related issues and hazards associated with ill-health as well as to continue to attempt to facilitate a resolution.

### **Working towards Scent-Free**

A log of scent-related complaint/issue events should be developed and maintained by Risk Management Support group, to act as a tool to assist in future response to similar concerns (e.g., scenario, response, recommendations and outcome). Managers are encouraged to support, and contribute to, this process.