

SCENTED PRODUCTS AWARENESS GUIDELINES

Introduction

University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) is committed to a healthy and safe working and learning environment. It endeavours to provide an indoor environment that supports the University community at work and study. Some people experience severe health problems from exposure to chemicals contained in scented products which may be present in the workplace. This guideline is being offered as a method of raising the awareness of all persons entering UOIT buildings regarding the need to reduce or eliminate the use of scented products wherever possible as well as providing best practices for the management of scent-related complaints and concerns.

Potential impacts of scented products

Scented products include:

- Personal hygiene products: (shampoo conditioners after-shave, colognes, lotions, hair spray, cosmetics, oils, candles, deodorants and fragrances)
- Industrial and household cleaners and chemicals
- Air fresheners

Some chemicals contained in scented products are known to be respiratory irritants. For the general population, exposure to scented products is not typically problematic. However, from time to time, the presence of perfumes and other scented products can present indoor air quality concerns which may affect an individual's comfort. For a very small portion of the population, scented products can present a health risk. For individuals with pre-existing medical conditions, exposure to some odours can cause a range of ill health effects. Even at very low concentrations, individuals sensitive to these chemicals may experience a wide range of symptoms such as asthmatic reactions, rashes, headaches, nausea, dizziness, light-headedness, fatigue, weakness, malaise, and anxiety. When the exposure to scented products occurs indoors, the impact is magnified.

Scent Related Issues and Complaints

While medical research has not established a positive cause-effect relationship between scent-exposure and disease, it is acknowledged that at times, exposure to scents can act as a trigger to symptomatic response. Scent-related complaints and issues will typically fall into one of two separate categories:

- a) There is medically supported evidence of ill-health effects (either arising from or exacerbated by scents) on another person; or
- b) The concern is comfort-related

In the case of a substantiated medical concern:

- If possible, scent awareness signage will be posted in proximity to the affected individual's workstation.
- Parties responsible for the scent will be informed of the situation (without disclosure of confidential medical information), and asked to support the initiative to reduce or eliminate the scent exposure source.
- In the case that scent reduction is not possible, in the affected worker's environment, consideration will be given to accommodating the individual's medical condition through consultation with UOIT Human Resources.

In the case of comfort-related issues:

- The supervisor will investigate the concern.
- If possible, scent awareness signage will be posted in proximity to the affected individual's workstation.
- Parties responsible for the scent will be informed of the situation, any indoor air quality investigation, and asked to support the initiative to reduce scent exposure.
- If necessary, the Joint Health and Safety Committee will be notified of any required industrial hygiene testing.
- In the event that scent reduction or elimination cannot be achieved in the affected worker's environment, efforts should be made to explain the difference between comfort-related issues and hazard associated with ill-health.

What to do if a co-worker or someone in your department is wearing a scented product that is causing you problems

As with any health and safety issue, discuss the situation with your supervisor or department head first. You may be advised to approach the individual in a cordial and respectful manner and let them know how scents affect your health. Share any supportive reference documents and seek their cooperation and understanding. Suggest they consider using an unscented product. If the person requests additional documentation, refer them to these guidelines, and if necessary, the Health and Safety Officer. You may wish to place a scented products awareness poster in your office or on the door so that people are aware of your concern.

Managerial Response

When you raise your concern with your supervisor or department head they will first ask you how the product(s) in question have affected you and what symptoms you are experiencing. Be specific about your symptoms and explain when your symptoms appear.

Your supervisor or department head will document this information and pursue one or more of the following options:

- if possible, scent awareness signage will be posted in proximity to the affected individual's workstation;

- approach the person wearing the scented product in a cordial and respectful manner as explained above;
- distribute these guidelines to all staff and discuss the content as a general workplace issue or;
- discuss your concerns privately with the individual involved and suggest that an unscented product be used as an alternative because of the adverse effects that are being experienced.

What happens if the scented product continues to be worn?

The supervisor or manager may be asked to address the concern sensitively, based on the specific circumstances involved. All management parties will endeavour to resolve the issue in a way that is respectful of the feelings and dignity of all concerned. A directive may be issued by the supervisor or manager that only unscented products be worn in the area.

What if I am approached about a scented product I am wearing?

Do not be embarrassed. Ask questions such as: Is it the amount or the type of scented product I'm using which is causing the effects? Be willing to reach a resolution in a cooperative manner. Consider reducing or eliminating the use of the scented product or using an alternative unscented product.

REFERENCES

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