



Scent Reduction Initiative

University of New Brunswick Saint John

The University of New Brunswick in Saint John is committed to creating a safe and healthy educational & work environment for students, staff, faculty and visitors. Air quality is an essential component to a healthy environment. In order to maintain a high standard of air quality, students, faculty, staff and visitors to UNB Saint John should refrain from wearing or using natural, artificial and/or synthetic scented personal products such as perfume, cologne, aftershave, body wash, hairspray, hand lotion, etc. The use of scented room fresheners, cleaning products and solvents, or any other source of strong odor that contributes to poor air quality should also be avoided.

Rationale for the Scent Reduction Initiative at UNB:

“*We will* provide a positive working and learning environment, one in which all members of our community are respectful and respected as individuals” (UNB Strategic Plan 2012, p. 19) In keeping with this goal, and the rights of all members of the university community to a safe environment, this reduced scent initiative is needed to educate our community and enable safe participation in the working and learning environment.

More than 1 in 4 Canadians suffers from respiratory disease. Evidence clearly shows that scented products are harmful to the health of sensitive individuals. For many, it may pose a serious health risk. Symptoms as a result of exposure range from migraines, headaches, skin irritations, sinusitis, nausea, dizziness, respiratory impairment, fatigue, depression, high blood pressure, eye, ear, throat and nose irritation, asthma symptoms, double vision, and rashes and hives. Individuals with severe allergies can go into anaphylactic shock, requiring immediate medical treatment. (Lung Association of Canada, 2007).

“The only safe assumption about scented products is that they contain numerous toxic chemicals which constantly vaporize into the air and attach themselves to hair, clothing, and surroundings” (NB Lung Association. 2007).

Who should be aware of this initiative?

Students, staff, faculty and any person visiting the UNB Saint John campus.

How can you help?

The UNB Saint John university community is encouraged to create awareness of the Scent Reduction guidelines. Actions can include:

- Scent Reduction signage should be placed throughout the UNB Saint John campus.
- Faculty members could reference the Scent Reduction Initiative on course syllabi, websites, emails and other public correspondence.
- Guests to the campus should be informed by their host of the Scent Reduction Initiative before their arrival. (Ex. guest speakers).
- The Initiative should appear in UNB Saint John websites, SRC websites, student handbooks and other appropriate information sites or publications.
- Members of the UNB community are encouraged to visit the websites listed below, and learn more about chemical sensitivities.

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

- Do not take offence – this request is about the impact of chemicals on people, NOT ABOUT YOU.
- Listen to your co-worker and ask questions. Find out whether your co-worker is more concerned about the type of product or the amount you wear. Discuss the issue openly and respectfully.
- When discussing the issue please remember that EDUCATION IS THE KEY.
- Be willing to reach a resolution in a cooperative manner.
- Consider an alternative product.

What can I do about it?

- Be considerate of those who are sensitive to scented products.
- Be aware of the types of products that you use that are scented.
- This also includes laundry and cleaning products that are scented, as well as, plants, candles, and air fresheners.
- If you do use 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 (Scented Products Education and Information Association of Canada (SPEIAC), 2012).
- Do not apply scented products in a public area.

What can I do when a co-worker in my department is wearing a scented product that is causing problems?

- Approach your co-worker discretely and explain (Education is the Key) how scents affect your health. Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for his/her cooperation and understanding.
- Refer co-workers to this document and other resources for further information.
- Inform your supervisor of your health issues, sensitivities, symptoms and the types of exposure that improve or worsen these symptoms.
- Consult with your physician.
- Know your own triggers, what chemicals particularly affect you, so they can be effectively avoided, and so you can accurately inform others when necessary.

What can I do as a supervisor?

- Managers and supervisors should listen to and be sensitive to employee's concerns related to scented products. Be aware that some concerns may be indicators of other air quality problems. Others may relate primarily to minor discomfort and if so, education, awareness, and co-operation by all employees will likely resolve the issue.
- Common sense is often the best guide when a concern about a scent in the workplace is raised.
- Remember that the perfect solution may not be possible or even practical. Also remember that, for workers who are experiencing serious adverse reactions due to a medical condition or disability, a more specific response and accommodation may be required.
- Promote a scent-free environment with posters, reminders, recognition of achievement when symptoms or complaints have decreased, and by refraining from the use of scent yourself – be a role model.

Problem resolution steps common to most situations.

Accept the concern in good faith, and treat the person with respect. Sensitivities are a medical condition that merit thoughtful consideration. Listen to the employee and make sure the nature and concern is understood. Whether the concern about an apparent “scented product” relates to a discomfort, annoyance issue or a more severe physical reaction, try to assess the nature and extent of the concern. Be sure you are clear that your questions are for the purpose of establishing a safe environment, and are not meant to be intrusive or skeptical. Some sample questions that may assist you in isolating a possible cause are:

- How often does the discomfort arise?
- Does the discomfort occur at a particular time of day or at a particular location in the workplace?
- Do you know what chemicals or scents particularly affect you, so those might be eliminated?

In many circumstances scented products may not be the sole cause, or the primary cause, of the employee’s signs and symptoms, although that may be the initial perception. Other factors could be:

- Poor indoor air quality
- The time of year (during flu or hay fever season)
- Other environmental elements such as dust, pollen, smoke, or newly-installed furnishings or synthetic products that release chemicals into the air

Investigate the issue and use good judgment and consideration to provide a fair, uniform and timely resolution. Discuss the issue with your staff in an open and non-threatening manner and request cooperation. Refer those issues which cannot be resolved to Human Resources Office.

What is the University doing about it?

Recognizing that chemicals, including scented chemicals, can negatively impact indoor air quality, the University will strive to:

- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including scented products.
- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products in laboratories, cleaning materials, and building materials.

References:

Canadian Human Rights Commission – Policy on Environmental Sensitivities

http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation_policies/policy_environ_politique-eng.aspx

Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety – Scent Free Policy for the Workplace

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

University of Winnipeg – Scent Free Guideline

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

McMaster University – Scent-Aware Guideline

<http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/safetyoffice/documents/ScntAwarenessGuidelinesApr04.pdf>

University of Prince Edward Island – Scent Free Initiative

[http://www.upei.ca/policy/files/policy/Scnt-Free%20Initiative%20\(admhrdohs0004\)_1.pdf](http://www.upei.ca/policy/files/policy/Scnt-Free%20Initiative%20(admhrdohs0004)_1.pdf)

University of Windsor – Scent Free Guidelines

http://www.uwindsor.ca/ohrea/sites/uwindsor.ca.ohrea/files/Scnt%20Free%20Guidelines_0.pdf

Canadian Medical Association Journal – “Scent-free policies generally unjustified”, 5 April, 2011- 183(6)

<http://www.canadianmedicaljournal.ca/content/183/6/E315>

NB Lung Association

<http://www.nb.lung.ca/pdf/DevelopingaScntfreePolicyforaWorkplace.pdf>

Questions regarding the Scent Reduction Initiative?

Terry-Lynne King, Nurse Practitioner, UNB Saint John Student Health Centre. tking@unbsj.ca
648-5656

David Gillespie, Manager, UNB Saint John Environmental Health, Safety, & Security
dgill@unb.ca 648-5505