

Scent-Awareness Guideline

Introduction

For the general population, exposure to scents is not typically problematic. However, for people with chemical or environmental sensitivities, asthma or allergies, exposure to scented products may pose a health and safety risk. Reported symptoms include: headaches, dizziness, light-headedness, 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 may include the following:

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

Since scent-sensitivity may trigger a person's existing disability or be a disability itself, Sheridan has a duty to accommodate people with scent-sensitivity to the point of undue hardship. In practice, this may mean modifying existing practices and procedures to help ensure that people with scent-sensitivity do not experience barriers to the working and learning environments.

Scent-Aware Sheridan

Sheridan employees, students and visitors have a shared responsibility to maintain an equitable and inclusive environment. The Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEI) has prepared this guideline to raise awareness at Sheridan about the issue of scent-sensitivity. The guideline is intended to:

- Advise employees, students and visitors on how to take proactive steps to minimize the use of scented products
- Inform you of what to do if you are experiencing adverse health effects due to exposure to scented products
- Provide useful tips on what to do if you are approached about your use of a scented product
- Guide you as to how to respond if you are approached by an employee in the workplace or a student in the classroom about scent-sensitivity

- Raise awareness about scent-sensitivity and assist areas to move toward a scent-free Sheridan

The scope of this guideline extends to all Sheridan buildings and off campus locations occupied by Sheridan employees, students and visitors. This document is also available as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). If you require the document in an alternate format or with communication supports, please contact the Centre for Equity and Inclusion at equity@sheridancollege.ca

Be proactive and minimize the use of scented products

There are a number of ways to be proactive and minimize the use of, and exposure to, scented products:

- Use scent-free products while in Sheridan facilities, including the workplace and learning spaces
- Avoid harsh chemicals and scented products in the cleaning, maintenance or renovation of Sheridan’s facilities
- Schedule cleaning, maintenance or renovation, etc. where an “atypical” odour may occur to “off” hours or at times of reduced occupancy. Where possible occupants of affected areas should be notified of this occurrence

Steps to take if you are experiencing adverse health effects due to exposure to scented products

1. If you are an employee, student or visitor experiencing an adverse reaction, try to use a “direct approach” if possible.

- Where it is clear that the source of your symptoms can be isolated to one person, consider privately approaching the individual wearing the scented product in a polite and constructive way, and ask if they “could refrain from wearing that product.” Every effort should be made by affected parties to establish a quick and mutually beneficial resolution
- Where the scent is more generalized and/or the source is unidentifiable, or you are unable to resolve the issue with the individual, or do not feel comfortable doing so, approach your Manager (employee) or your Professor (student) with your concern
- Generalized indoor air quality concerns may first be reported to Facilities Services at each campusⁱ and then, if necessary, to [Occupational Health and Safety Services \(OHS\)](#)

2. If you require accommodation related to your scent-sensitivity:

- Students may contact the [Accessible Learning Office](#) at your campus
- Employees should follow the steps outlined in the [Workplace Accommodation Procedure \(Employee\)](#)

- If you are a job applicant, follow the steps outlined in the [Workplace Accommodation Procedure \(Job Applicant\)](#)

3. If you are an employee and your reaction is sufficiently severe that you are unable to perform your normal work, such that you seek outside health care and/or lose time from work as a result of exposure to scented products:

- a. Report the exposure incident, including the need for outside health care and/or lost time, to your Manager as an occupational illness/injury
- b. Follow the steps outlined in Sheridan's [Return to Work Procedure](#)

4. If you are a student and your reaction is sufficiently severe that you are unable to attend class, such that you seek medical attention and/or fall behind in schoolwork:

- Contact the [Accessible Learning Office](#), if necessary, to discuss academic accommodation options.
- Talk to your Professor about catching up on any missed work

Useful tips

Please keep the following in mind if you are approached about your use of scented products:

- Be aware that exposure to scented products can cause serious symptoms in certain individuals
- Even if surprised and/or taken aback when approached, try to listen to your co-worker or the student in a non-defensive way
- Learn as much as possible about the types of scented products that may cause a co-worker or classmate to experience symptoms
- Be understanding of the concern and willing to reach a resolution in a co-operative manner
- Avoid wearing and using scented products

Steps to take if you are a Manager or a Faculty member approached by an individual with scented-product concerns

It is important to take these concerns seriously, and to document the concerns raised.

1. Where the concern relates directly to the use of a scented product by another individual in the workplace or classroom:

- Speak privately with the person wearing or using the scent. Indicate that a concern related to the use of their scented product(s) has been raised and that you would like to discuss options to avoid scent in the shared space. Any discussion should respect the confidentiality of the person who raised the concern.

- Advise the person that some people can be adversely affected by exposure to scented products and you are asking for their cooperation in making the environment inclusive.

2. If an employee's reaction is sufficiently severe that they are unable to perform their normal work and seek outside health care or lose time from the workplace, a Manager should assist the employee in completing an Incident Investigation Report and should follow the steps outlined in Sheridan's [Return to Work Procedure](#).

3. If a student's reaction is sufficiently severe that they are unable to attend class, seek medical attention and/or fall behind in schoolwork, advise the student to contact the [Accessible Learning Office](#) at each campus to discuss academic accommodation options.

If you have additional questions or require further information about this Guideline, please contact CEI at equity@sheridancollege.ca or ext. 2229.

¹ For Trafalgar campus contact fmdsk@tra@sheridancollege.ca, For Davis campus contact fmdskdav@sheridancollege.ca, For HMC campus contact fmdskhmc@sheridancollege.ca