



Scent Safety at Okanagan College

Introduction

Okanagan College is committed to providing safe, healthy, and respectful spaces, and recognizes that scented products can negatively impact the health of some individuals. Okanagan College's [Scent Safety Program](#) endeavors to control exposure to scented products by increasing awareness, encouraging individuals to voluntarily avoid the use of scented products in our spaces, and providing guidance on addressing scent-related issues. Scent safety is also achieved through the elimination, substitution, reduction, or isolation from heavily scented products and materials in our spaces.

General Information

Exposure to heavily scented products can adversely affect some individual's health. In sufficient concentrations scented products may trigger responses in those with allergies or chemical sensitivities. Allergic and asthmatic people, as well as those with other conditions, report that exposure to scented products, even in the smallest amounts, can trigger a response. Reported symptoms can include but are not limited to:

- Headaches, migraines
- Dizziness, lightheadedness
- Weakness
- Confusion
- Numbness
- Upper respiratory symptoms
- Skin irritation
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- Malaise
- Anxiety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sinus congestion
- Loss of appetite

The severity of these symptoms can vary. Some may only experience mild irritation while others can be incapacitated. Individuals who experience severe symptoms may require formal health accommodations that can be arranged for students through Accessibility Services, and for employees through Human Resources.

Scented Product Categories

Personal Products:

Hygiene: Products include cosmetics, perfumes, colognes, after-shave and scented shaving creams, deodorant, shampoo/conditioners, hair spray, lotion, and creams.

Non-Hygiene: Products include scented candles, potpourri, scented markers, aroma therapy products and essential oils.

Non-Personal Products:

Products with a distinct scent or fragrance and include scented household/industrial cleaning products, air fresheners, deodorizers, construction materials (ex. paints, adhesives, solvents).



What the College is Doing:

- Asking all Okanagan College community members (staff, students, visitors, and contractors) to be considerate of others by eliminating, substituting, or reducing the use of scented products in Okanagan College spaces;
- Including Scent Safety information in New Employee Orientations, so workers are informed of the issue and aware of expectations;
- Including Scent Safety information in student handbooks and orientations, so students are informed of the issue and aware of expectations;
- Providing signage throughout our spaces as reminders to be considerate of others by eliminating, substituting, or reducing the use of scented products;
- Conducting annual information campaigns to educate the college community on scent safety;
- Providing guidance for dealing with scent safety issues in college spaces;
- Providing additional scent safety resources.

What You Can Do:

- Be considerate of others by eliminating, substituting, or reducing the use of scented products in Okanagan College spaces;
- A general guideline for personal scents is that they should not be detectable from more than an arm's length away;
- Be understanding if you are approached about a scent issue, and collaborative in finding a solution;

Guidance for Dealing with Scent Sensitive Situations

Dealing with a scent issue relating to personal products can be challenging. It can feel awkward and uncomfortable to raise a concern or be approached about a scent issue. The following approaches are designed to guide you in appropriately handling these types of situations in the office, classroom, and common areas at Okanagan College.

Students and Employees

If you are a student or employee who reacts negatively to scented personal products and there is a scent in your surroundings that is causing you to have a reaction, try the following:

- Approach the person in a non-confrontational manner to communicate your concerns about the scented product being worn;
- Focus the conversation on education by explaining the negative health impacts you experience;
- Remember to always maintain tact and respect;



Health and Safety Program Manual

- Inform the person that there is more information and resources available in Okanagan College's [Scent Safety Program](#);
- Ask the person to consider switching to unscented products;
- Respectful conversations typically lead to understanding, cooperation, and resolution; however,
- If you cannot resolve the situation, speak to your supervisor/instructor.

Speak to your instructor or supervisor if direct contact with the person wearing the scent will worsen your reaction, or if you don't feel comfortable approaching the person wearing the scent. Let your instructor or supervisor know the following:

- What causes your reaction;
- The problem(s) you are experiencing; and,
- What, if anything, you have already tried to do to resolve the issue.

If the scent issue relates to a non-personal product, notify your instructor or supervisor for assistance in resolving the issue.

Supervisor/Instructor

If you are approached by an employee/student who has a negative health reaction triggered by scents:

- Respond as quickly as possible;
- Remove the employee/student from the scent that is causing the problem;
- Identify the source of the scent. If the scent is related to a personal product, discreetly approach the individual who is wearing the scent and politely discuss the problem;
- Remind them that Okanagan College promotes scent safety in all spaces and requests voluntary compliance;
- Ask the person to consider switching to unscented products;
- Inform the person that there is more information and resources available in Okanagan College's [Scent Safety Program](#);
- Get back to the employee/student who is experiencing a reaction with an account of what has been done on their behalf. Continue to monitor the situation;
- The Occupational Health and Safety Department is available to provide additional guidance and advice on resolving scent issues;
- Perfect solutions may not always be possible or even practical. In some instances, employees/students who experience serious adverse reactions due to medical conditions or disability may require medical accommodations;
- Formal medical accommodations can be arranged for students through Accessibility Services, and for employees through Human Resources;
- Refer those issues that cannot be resolved to the Health and Safety Department for further assistance.



For individuals who have been approached about their scented personal products:

- Do not take offense - this is about the impact of scent on people, not about you;
- Work with others to find out what product or products are causing the reaction;
- Learn more about Okanagan College's [Scent Safety Program](#); and
- Become part of the solution and switch to a scent free alternative

Resources:

- WorkSafeBC: Indoor Air Quality www.worksafebc.com
- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety www.ccohs.ca
- British Columbia Lung Association www.bc.lung.ca
- Canadian Health Network www.canadian-health-network.ca
- Guide to Less Toxic Products www.lesstoxicguide.ca