

Scent Reduction Guideline
St. Thomas University
March 18, 2016

Background

St. Thomas University is committed to a safe and healthy environment for our university community. This guideline is intended to increase awareness of the need to reduce the use of scented products wherever possible. This document will provide guidelines for the management of scent-related complaints and concerns due to the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health and well-being and productivity of those affected most adversely.

The University is asking for your voluntary cooperation as we move towards a scent-reduced environment in all St. Thomas University buildings. We encourage avoiding or reducing the use of fragranced products and replacing them with unscented alternatives.

What is the problem with scents?

Individuals with pre-existing conditions who are exposed to some odours can experience a range of negative 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 concentrating and/or skin irritation. Although we generally think that it is a personal choice to use scented products, by their very nature they are shared. Fragrance chemicals vapourize in the air and are easily inhaled by those around us.

Why does St. Thomas University NOT have a scent-free policy?

As there is no guideline or policy in place now, introducing a guideline is seen as an initial step to addressing this issue. At this stage, it is felt that increasing awareness of the issue and the expectation of voluntary cooperation with the guideline will be sufficient to remedy any existing problems.

Guideline

Be specific.

Some people wear very strong and/or too much scent. Any strong aroma can be unpleasant and can cause a short-term reaction. Rather than ask everyone to eliminate all scented products, the University believes it is more practical to ask individuals whose use of scent may be affecting others negatively to modify their use.

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

Do not take offence as this request is about the impact of chemicals on people, not about you. Listen and ask questions. Find out whether the person is more concerned about the type of product or the amount you wear. Discuss the issue openly. When discussing the issue please remember that

education is the key. Be willing to reach a resolution in a cooperative manner and to consider an alternative product.

What can I do about it?

By replacing your chemical-based perfumes and other products with unscented and/or natural versions, you are reducing your exposure to harmful chemicals and helping anyone around you who is 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. 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. Do not apply scented products in a public area.

What can I do when someone is wearing a scented product that is causing problems?

Approach the individual discreetly and explain how scents affect your health. Remember that education is the key. Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for his/her cooperation and understanding. If you're a staff member, inform your supervisor of your health issues, sensitivities, symptoms and the types of exposure that improve or worsen these symptoms.

A printable card has been created (see Appendix A) that an affected person can use to promote scent reduction in the workplace/on campus or to discreetly inform an individual of the impact of the scented product they are wearing.

What can I do as a Supervisor or as a Faculty Member?

It is important to listen and be sensitive to an individual's concerns related to scented products. Be aware that this guideline is not designed to address the dislike of any given scent, such as the dislike of the scent of a particular type of food, especially when the scent does not aggravate a medically-diagnosed scent sensitivity. In either case, however, education, awareness, and co-operation by those involved will likely resolve the issue. Common sense and common courtesy are often the best guides when a concern about a scent is raised.

Remember that the perfect solution may not be possible or even practical. Also remember that, for individuals who are experiencing serious adverse reactions due to a medical condition or disability, a more specific response and accommodation may be required.

Problem resolution steps common to most situations.

Listen to the individual and make sure the nature of the concern is understood. Whether the concern about an apparent scented product relates to discomfort, an annoyance issue or a more severe physical reaction, try to assess the nature and extent of the concern. 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 at the University?
- Does the discomfort arise only at the University or elsewhere as well?

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. For example, the time of year (during flu or hay fever season) may be playing a role.

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

This guideline was adapted, with permission, from Dara Klym, Safety Officer at the University Of Winnipeg. Email: d.klym@uwinnipeg.ca

Appendix A – Printable Awareness Card



St. Thomas University

Scent Reduction Guideline Awareness Card

This card is intended to help explain how the use of scents is a health hazard especially to those with scent sensitivities.

Although it is not widely known, scented products adversely affect people's health, causing symptoms like dizziness, confusion, nausea, and fatigue. Scented products include perfumes, colognes, shampoos, detergents and deodorants, among other products.

In response to health concerns, STU has developed a Scent Reduction Guideline. Scented products such as hair spray, perfume, and deodorant can trigger reactions such as respiratory distress and headaches. Faculty, staff, students and visitors are asked to not use these products on campus or when planning to come to campus.

The cooperation of everyone on campus is vital to the success of the Scent Reduction Guideline. More information can be found at http://w3.stu.ca/stu/facultyandstaff/health_safety/.