

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 69 (QUALICUM)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

TOWARDS A SCENT CONSIDERATE SCHOOL/WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Page 1 of 4

PURPOSE

There has been increasing awareness in the District that exposure to perfumes and other chemically-scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities.

Fragrances are found in a wide range of products. Common scented products include perfume, cologne, aftershave, deodorant, soap, shampoo, hairspray, body spray, makeup and powders. Examples of other products with added scents include air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, carpet deodorizers, facial tissues, and candles.

We generally think that it is a personal choice to use fragrances; however, fragrance chemicals are by their very nature shared. The chemicals vaporize into the air and are easily inhaled by those around us. Today's scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals, many of which are synthetic compounds derived from petroleum products. These fragrance chemicals, classified as volatile organic compounds, can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

Individuals can experience a variety of symptoms, including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate. Some of these fragrance chemicals are known to be skin sensitizers. Some are also respiratory tract irritants, and can trigger asthma and breathing difficulties. Individuals with respiratory challenges commonly cite fragrances as initiating or exacerbating their asthma. Fragrances are also implicated in vascular changes that can trigger migraines in individuals. Individuals with chemical sensitivities can experience symptoms at very low levels in the air, far below those known to cause harmful effects in the general population.

Although the mechanisms by which fragrance chemicals act to produce symptoms are not yet understood, the impact on all those affected can be quite severe, resulting in great difficulty in work and study activities.

WHAT IS THIS ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE INTENDED TO DO?

Firstly, this Administrative Procedure is intended to increase the awareness within the schools about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected.

Secondly, in order to protect those individuals with fragrance sensitivities and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities, the District is asking for voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment.

All staff, students and visitors are strongly encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of fragranced products, and to replace them with unscented alternatives.

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 69 (QUALICUM)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

TOWARDS A SCENT CONSIDERATE SCHOOL/WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Page 2 of 4

We recognize that the issue is complex and controversial to some. We recognize the personal right of individuals to use scented products. We believe, however, that this must be balanced with the adverse health effects and extreme discomfort that can be suffered by fragrance-sensitive individuals.

This is not an issue about an individual disliking the smell of a particular perfume and getting what he/she wants in the workplace. This is not a ban on scented products. This is a request to voluntarily refrain from chemical-based scented products.

WHAT IS THE DISTRICT DOING ABOUT IT?

Recognizing that chemicals, including fragrance' chemicals, can negatively impact on indoor air quality, the District

- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including fragrance chemicals.
- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products in cleaning materials and building materials.
- Target harmful chemicals and contaminants and implement controls to effectively prevent or minimize their release into the general air as a result of building, maintenance, custodial, research and teaching activities.
- Support the best possible air quality practicably attainable, by means of proper ventilation, peak performance and proper maintenance of building mechanical ventilation systems, in keeping with the District's Indoor Air Quality Standard.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- Be considerate of those who are sensitive to fragrance chemicals. Avoid using chemically-scented products; instead, use unscented alternatives.
- If you do use chemically-scented products, use them sparingly. A general guideline for chemically-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.
- Be an informed customer. Read the product label. A product labeled as "fragrance-free" is likely to be free of fragrance chemicals. A product labeled as "scent-free" or "unscented" may mean that no fragrance chemicals have been added to the product, or it may be that a masking agent has been added to disguise the smell of some of the ingredients. These terms are not regulated, so use your nose or ask the store to check the product for fragrances.
- Avoid using products (e.g. air fresheners or potpourris) that give off chemical-based scents in your work area.
- Avoid using laundry products or cleaning agents that are chemically-scented. Air out dry-cleaned clothing before wearing.

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 69 (QUALICUM)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

TOWARDS A SCENT CONSIDERATE SCHOOL/WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Page 3 of 4

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU ARE SENSITIVE TO FRAGRANCE CHEMICALS?

- If you feel you can do so comfortably, approach the scented individual and let him/her know how you react to fragrances. Be specific about the types of physical reactions you have (e.g. asthma attacks, migraines, shortness of breath). Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for their understanding and cooperation. Many people are unaware of the potential health effects of fragrance chemicals.
- Inform your Principal/ Vice Principal/Manager of your sensitivities, your symptoms, and the types of exposures that improve or worsen these symptoms. Ask your Principal/Vice Principal/Manager to assist in finding a solution to your situation. You may ask your Principal/Vice Principal/Manager to discuss this matter with the individual involved if you do not feel comfortable doing so, or if the individual has done nothing after you have advised him/her of your situation.
- Consult with your physician about your symptoms.

WHAT CAN THE PRINCIPAL/VICE PRINCIPAL/MANAGER DO?

If an individual in your work area is adversely affected by chemically-scented products:

- Listen to the person with respect and civility.
- Clarify the issue. Ask the individual to describe their health effects, the factors that make the problem better or worse, and the actions they are taking to deal with it.
- 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. Inform them of the health concerns that have arisen as a result of the use of chemically-scented products in the workplace. You may choose to have this discussion with an individual or a group of employees, whichever is appropriate to the situation.
- Request your staff's cooperation and understanding to voluntarily avoid the use of chemically-scented products in the area. Discuss the benefits of a scent-free work area.
- Implement measures to reasonably accommodate those who are affected by scented products. Where employees are severely limited due to exposure to scented products, you may need to establish a fragrance-free zone. For meetings held in enclosed rooms, you may need to send out notices to attendees informing them of the scent-free nature of the meeting.
- Consult with Operations staff regarding the adequacy of ventilation in the area.
- Distribute this information and display the "No Scents make Good Sense" poster.

SCHOOL DISTRICT No. 69 (QUALICUM)

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

TOWARDS A SCENT CONSIDERATE SCHOOL/WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

Page 4 of 4

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU ARE APPROACHED BECAUSE OF THE SCENTED PRODUCT YOU ARE WEARING?

- If an individual or your Principal/Vice Principal/Manager informs you that the fragranced products that you use or wear are a problem and requests that you avoid using them, you may feel puzzled, hurt, annoyed, defensive or even insulted by the request.
- Understand that it is not about you as a person or about your choice of fragrance, but it is about the chemicals in the fragranced product. Do not discount the issue as ridiculous and unreasonable.
- Discuss the issue openly. Ask questions about the health impact on the person, the types of symptoms experienced, the factors which make the person's symptoms better or worse (e.g. fragrance type, amount used).
- Empathize with the individual. Work with cooperation and understanding towards a satisfactory resolution.

References:

- *Board Policy 8007: Towards a Scent Considerate School/Workplace Environment*
- *WorkSafeBC: Scent Safety in the Workplace*
- *Central Okanagan School District – Toward a Scent-Reduced School Environment*