No scents make sense

Perfumes and scented products are everywhere and have been widely used for centuries. But there is a growing awareness that scented products can have a negative impact on indoor air quality and personal health. For people with certain medical conditions (such as asthma, migraines or chemical sensitivity), scented products can trigger serious health reactions that can lead to illness, lost productivity, absence from school or work and even hospitalization.

Scents can affect health

Historically, perfumes were made with natural ingredients derived from plants and animals. But, in recent years, the fragrance industry has replaced many of these natural ingredients with chemical compounds. Over 3,000 chemicals are now used in making fragrances and one perfume can contain up to 500 different chemicals. These synthetic ingredients may be responsible for the increasing number of health problems associated with scented products.

People who react to fragrances can experience a variety of health symptoms, ranging from mild to severe. Fragrance chemicals vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled, causing respiratory irritations and breathing difficulties. Some fragrance chemicals cause skin reactions and others can trigger vascular changes that may lead to asthma and migraine headaches. People who are susceptible can experience symptoms even when there are very low levels of fragrance chemicals in the air.

What products contain scents?

Scents are commonly found in cosmetics and other personal grooming products, such as perfumes, cologne, aftershave, creams, hairspray, soaps and shampoo. But they are also found in many other products that we use frequently at home and in the workplace, including:

- air fresheners
- facial tissues
- dishwashing liquid
- laundry detergents and fabric softeners
- candles
- building material
- upholstery fabrics
- carpeting
- newsprint
- industrial and household cleaners

Managing scents in the workplace

Employers have a responsibility to accommodate staff members who have a chemical sensitivity or a serious medical reaction to scented products. This is the same responsibility that employers have in addressing any safety or health hazard in the workplace.

The Peel board takes this responsibility seriously and has developed guidelines to help supervisors create a scent-free workplace. To request a copy, please contact Health and Safety at 905-890-1010 ext. 2424.

Creating a scent-reduced work environment

To protect people who are sensitive to scented products, the Peel board is asking for volunteer co-
operation in moving towards a scent-reduced environment. Staff are encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of scented products and to replace them with unscented alternatives.

Here are some steps that you can take to help make your work environment fragrance-free:

- Be considerate of others. Recognize that some people may have allergies or adverse reactions to fragrances. Reduce or eliminate your use of scented products and encourage your friends, colleagues and visitors to follow your example.
- Raise awareness about the effect of scented products on indoor air quality and personal health by putting up No Scents Make Sense posters in your department.
- Make information about unscented products available to your staff or colleagues.
- If you have a reaction to scented products, let your supervisor know so that the appropriate actions can be taken to protect your health.
- Everyone shares responsibility for maintaining good indoor air quality. Report any ventilation problems in your workplace to your supervisor.