Greater Essex County District School Board

Name: Environmental Sensitivities
Operational Procedure
Department: Facility Services
Responsibility: Superintendent of Business, Treasurer and Facility Services
Effective Date: April 17, 2012
Review Date: March 25, 2026
Next Review Date: 2031

Rationale

Given the awareness that students, staff, and community members may experience environmental sensitivities, the Greater Essex County District School Board is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for individuals adversely affected by scented products.

The GECDSB will take action to mitigate environmental sensitivities by limiting exposure to chemicals in their facilities and increasing awareness by communicating the potential symptoms and effects of chemical and fragrance sensitivities often found in everyday products, such as cleaning solutions and grooming aids.

This operations procedure is not intended as an outright ban on scented products. Rather, staff, students, visitors and contractors are encouraged to be considerate of individuals who are allergic or sensitive to scented products and should avoid or reduce the use of fragranced products.

Definitions

None applicable.

Procedure

1. This operations procedure is Intended to:

i. Provide a heightened awareness about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing and productivity of those affected;
ii. Communicate the potential symptoms and effects of chemical and fragrance sensitivities;
iii. Acknowledge and respect symptoms experienced by those with sensitivities;
iv. Encourage scent-free or scent-reduced products to be used wherever possible;
v. Increase awareness with staff, students and visitors by encouraging voluntary cooperation; and,
vi. Provide staff with the appropriate steps for responding to scent-related issues.

2. What is the Concern?

Exposure to scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, other medical conditions 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 and facial tissues. Tobacco and other smoke-related products may also cause environmental sensitivities.

Fragrance chemicals are, by their very nature, shared and are therefore not only a personal choice. The chemicals vaporize and are easily inhaled by those in the vicinity. Scented products are a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and can cause or aggravate existing health problems.

Some fragrance chemicals are known to be skin sensitizers. Some are also respiratory tract irritants and can trigger asthma and breathing difficulties. Asthmatics commonly cite fragrances as initiating or exacerbating their asthma. Fragrances are also implicated in vascular changes that can trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. Individuals with chemical sensitivities can experience symptoms when fragrance chemicals are at very low levels in the air, far below those known to cause harmful effects in the general population. Naturally sourced fragrances are less likely to be implicated in adverse reactions.

Susceptible individuals can experience a variety of symptoms including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, urticaria (hives), mental confusion and an inability to concentrate.

The impact on those affected can be quite severe, resulting in great difficulty in work and study activities.

To provide a healthier working and learning environment, staff, students and visitors are encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of artificially fragranced products, and to replace them with unscented or natural/hypoallergenic alternatives.

3. How Can You Help?

i. Be aware and consider that there are co-workers, students, and visitors who are sensitive to fragrance chemicals;
ii. Use scent-free or scent–reduced products whenever possible;
iii. Avoid applying scented products in a public area;
iv. Avoid using products (e.g. air fresheners or potpourris) that give off chemical- based scents in your work area; and,
v. Avoid using laundry products or cleaning agents that are scented and air out dry-cleaned clothing before wearing.

4. How Do You Deal with Co-workers Regarding Scents?

i. If a co-worker is using a scented product that is affecting you, you may choose to discuss the issue with your co-worker directly, if you are comfortable doing so. Be specific about the types of physical reactions you have (e.g. asthma attacks, migraines, shortness of breath, etc.). Approach your co-worker in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for their understanding and cooperation. Many people are unaware of the potential health effects of fragrance chemicals.

ii. Inform your supervisor or instructor of your sensitivities, your symptoms and the types of exposures that improve or worsen these symptoms. Ask them to assist in finding a solution to your situation. As an employee, you may ask your supervisor to discuss this matter with the individual involved or with the group of employees. As a student, you can ask your teacher to discuss the issue with the class and ask for their cooperation in not using scented products.

iii. Be respectful of cultural differences that should be considered when talking about the use of scented products in order not to give offense.

iv. Consult with your physician about your symptoms. Be prepared to provide medical documentation where required.

5. How Can You Assist as a Supervisor?

i. Listen to the individual with respect.

ii. Clarify the issue. Ask the individual to describe their health effects, conditions that make the problem better or worse and the actions they are taking to deal with it. Where required, ask for medical documentation to help inform related action.

iii. Investigate the issue and use good judgment and consideration to provide a fair, uniform and timely resolution.

iv. Discuss the issue with your staff or students in an open and non-threatening manner. Inform them of the health concerns that have arisen as a result of the use of scented products in the workplace. You may choose to have this discussion with an individual or an entire group, whichever you determine to be appropriate to the situation.

v. Request cooperation to voluntarily avoid the use of scented products in the area. Discuss the benefits of a scent-free work area.

vi. Implement measures to reasonably accommodate those who are affected by scented products. Where employees are severely sensitive to scented products, you may need to introduce a fragrance-free zone. For meetings held in enclosed rooms, you may need to send out notices to attendees informing them that the meeting will be scent-free.

vii. Consult with Facility Services regarding the adequacy of ventilation in the area.

viii. Display the poster provided in Appendix A.

ix. Refer those issues which cannot be resolved to the Human Resources Department.

6. What Should You Do If You Are Approached Regarding the Scented Product You Are Wearing?
    i. If an individual or your supervisor informs you that the fragranced product(s) you use or wear are a problem and requests that you avoid using them, understand that it is not about you as a person or your choice of fragrance. It is about the chemicals in the fragranced product.
    ii. Discuss the issue openly. Ask questions about the health impact on individuals, the types of symptoms experienced and the factors which make symptoms better or worse (e.g. fragrance type, amount used, etc.).
    iii. Empathize with the individual. Work with cooperation and understanding toward a satisfactory resolution.

Reference

Not applicable.

Appendix

Environmental Sensitivities Poster.

Environmental Sensitivities

Let's work together to limit the use of scented products.



Please help us create a healthier environment by choosing to wear or use **scent-free products**.

www.publicboard.ca