



PROCEDURE

HR101

Fragrance/Scent – Safe Workplace

Board Received: May 31, 2021 Review Date: June 2025

Accountability:

1. Frequency of Report – As needed
2. Criteria for Success – All staff with identified chemical sensitivities are accommodated appropriately

Purpose:

The Grand Erie District School Board, as an employer, has a duty to support employees who may be adversely affected or suffer a severe medical reaction when exposed to a fragrance or scented product. Principals/managers have a responsibility to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to make the working environment safe for those with chemical sensitivities in the same manner that any other health issue or safety hazard is addressed.

In the interest of creating and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment for employees, this procedure has been developed to assist principals/managers with implementing a fragrance/scent-safe workplace when made aware that an employee is experiencing an adverse reaction to fragrances/scents in their work environment.

What is the Grand Erie District School Board doing about fragrance/scent related issues in the workplace?

Recognizing that fragrances and scents may negatively impact on indoor air quality, the Board will:

- Minimize the use of products which contain fragrances and scents.
- Promote the use of environmentally friendly products in cleaning and building materials.
- Optimize air quality by means of proper ventilation, as well as ensuring peak performance and proper maintenance of building ventilation systems.
- Develop information for the Grand Erie District School Board community.

Scope

This procedure applies to all work sites, buildings and schools, owned or leased by Grand Erie District School Board. It is applicable to all employees, students, volunteers and contractors as well as to visitors.

Definitions

Scent-free product: a product labeled unscented, scent-free or fragrance-free by the manufacturer.

Scent-reduced product: a product having minimal scent, labeled hypo-allergenic or for sensitive skin.

Scent/fragrance: a chemical or additive that creates an aroma or odour. These are found in a wide range of common products including perfume, aftershave, deodorant, soap, air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, facial tissues, candles, and maintenance products.

Note: the use of plug in air fresheners/essential oil diffusers and salt lamps are prohibited in all Grand Erie buildings.

Procedures for Responding to Fragrance/Scent Concerns

Scent-related complaints and issues will typically fall into one of two separate categories:

- a) Medically supported evidence of ill-health effects (either arising from or exacerbated by scents) provided; or
- b) Comfort- related concerns.

In the case of comfort-related concerns, only the informal process can be initiated. In the case that scent-free cannot be achieved in the affected workers' environment, efforts should be made to explain the difference between comfort-related issues and hazards associated with ill-health as well as to continue to attempt to facilitate a resolution.

A principal/manager is responsible for initiating the informal process when notified by an employee, either verbally or in writing, of a concern related to scents, fragrances and/or construction and maintenance products.

While it may be required at some point that the employee provide supporting medical documentation in respect to the causes and symptoms of their issue, the absence of such does not remove the need for an immediate response.

Principal/Manager Responsibilities

1.0 Informal Process

- 1.1 Meet with the individual to clarify the issue, to understand the impact that the fragrance/scent is having on their health and the actions that the individual is taking to address the problem.
- 1.2 In a timely manner, develop a fragrance/scent-safe workplace plan. Note – the workplace plan does not need to be complicated. It could be as simple as asking staff to refrain from wearing colognes/perfumes while at work.
- 1.3 Communicate with staff and students highlighting the key points of the plan and requesting everyone's cooperation and understanding to create a safe environment for all.
- 1.4 Continue to monitor the situation both in terms of the employee's health and the implementation of the plan.
- 1.5 If the principal/manager does not receive the necessary cooperation and/or the situation is not resolved by the informal steps, it may be necessary to initiate the formal process.
- 1.6 Administrator must document the steps they took to mitigate the concerns

2.0 Formal Process

- 2.1 Meet with the affected employee to discuss next steps, including consultation with the Health and Disability Officer and, where applicable their union representative and the requirement for medical documentation which includes specific restrictions and limitations. This is necessary in order to develop an official fragrance/scent-safe accommodation plan. Administrator must document the steps they took to mitigate the concerns
- 2.2 The Health and Disability Officer will facilitate the development of a medical accommodation plan that will identify the necessary actions and outline the responsibilities of the principal/manager/employee/superintendent to establish and maintain a fragrance/ scent-safe workplace. The plan may include but are not limited to:
 - Place a fragrance/scent-safe statement in all Ebase work orders for the workplace.

- Install signage indicating that this workplace is a fragrance/ scent-safe environment (front door, side entrance, daycare if applicable).
 - Update SDS 'The school is fragrance/scent-safe. No fragrances/scents permitted, due to potential severe allergic reaction'.
 - Memo to school staff (Appendix A)
 - Memo to parents - elementary (Appendix B)
 - Memo to students – secondary (Appendix C)
 - Memo to All Itinerant Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors including Childcare Programs (full day, Before and After programs) and Community Outreach Programs (Appendix D)
 - Memo to Maintenance Staff & Contractors (Appendix E)
 - For meetings held in enclosed rooms (within or outside of the school premises), advise attendees in advance that it will be a fragrance/scent-safe environment and to refrain from wearing any perfume/cologne or scent producing products. See Appendix F Sample Memo for School Newsletter
 - Reminder messages for curriculum night, interview night, school website, school newsletter (minimum once per term), and community use of schools.
- 2.3 Share the mandatory requirements of the workplace plan with staff, students and others who must comply with the expectations. Reinforce the need for cooperation to ensure that the goal of a healthy and safe workplace is attained.
- 2.4 Continue to monitor the situation both in terms of the employee's health and in the implementation of the plan.
- 2.5 If compliance with a fragrance/scent-safe workplace does not occur at this level, contact the superintendent with responsibility for the facility/workplace for support in addressing the issue.

Appendix A

Initial Memo to Staff

Dear Staff:

Please be aware that we have received a request to establish a fragrance/scent-safe workplace due to medical reasons. We ask that you review the following information and respond as requested. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the issue?

Exposure to fragrances and scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities.

Fragrances and scents are found in a wide range of products including perfume, aftershave, deodorant, soap, air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, facial tissues, and candles.

It is a personal choice to use fragrances or scents; however, it is important to recognize that the chemicals from which these are created are, by their very nature, shared. The chemicals vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled by those around us. Today's fragrances/scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

Susceptible individuals can experience a variety of symptoms, including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, and shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate. Although the mechanisms by which 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.

Moving towards a fragrance/scent-safe environment.

In order to protect those individuals with sensitivities to fragrances and scents, we are asking for your cooperation towards a fragrance/scent-safe environment in this workplace. Employees, students and visitors are strongly encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of fragrances or scented products.

What is the Grand Erie District School Board doing about fragrance/scent related issues in the workplace?

Recognizing that fragrances and scents may negatively impact on indoor air quality, the Board will:

- Minimize the use of products which contain fragrances and scents.
- Promote the use of environmentally friendly products in cleaning and building materials.
- Optimize air quality by means of proper ventilation, as well as ensuring peak performance and proper maintenance of building ventilation systems.
- Develop information for the Grand Erie community.

What can you do to help?

- Be considerate of those who are sensitive to fragrances and scents. Avoid using these products in the workplace.
- If you must use a fragrance or scented product, please use it sparingly. A general guideline for fragrances and scented products is that they should not be detectable more than an arm's length away.
- The use of plug in air fresheners/essential oil diffusers and salt lamps are prohibited in all Grand Erie buildings. If possible, avoid using scented laundry products or cleaning agents. Allow dry cleaned clothing to be aired out prior to wearing.

What should you do if you are approached because you are using a fragrance or wearing a scented product?

If you are informed that the fragrance that you are using or wearing is creating a health problem and you are requested to refrain from using the product while at work, 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 or scent, but it is about the product and the adverse effect it is having on someone.

- Consider discussing the issue openly with the person or with your supervisor and the person.
- Ask questions about the health impact on the person and the types of symptoms experienced.
- Work with cooperation and understanding towards a mutual satisfactory resolution.

What should you do if you encounter a person in the school who is either wearing a fragrance or using scented products?

- If you feel you can do so comfortably, approach the individual and let them know that the fragrance or scent may cause an adverse reaction to some individuals in the workplace. Talk to the individual in a cordial and respectful manner, requesting their understanding and cooperation. Remember that many people are unaware of the potential adverse health effects caused by the wearing or use of fragrances or scented products.
- As an employee, you may ask your supervisor/principal to discuss this matter with the individual involved or with the group of employees.

Thank you for your attention regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Principal/Manager, School/Dept/Board

Appendix B

Sample Memo for Parents - Elementary

Dear Parents,

XXX School is instituting a 'FRAGRANCE/SCENT-SAFE' environment in our school effective DATE.

This requirement is a necessary response to a medical concern and will apply to all staff, students, parents, visitors, and volunteers who work or visit the school.

Background

Fragrances and scents are found in a wide range of products including perfume, aftershave, deodorant, soap, air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, facial tissues, and candles. Exposure to fragrances and other scented products may trigger adverse health reactions (e.g., asthma attack, anaphylactic reaction and shortness of breath) in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities. Other less serious but equally debilitating symptoms include headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate.

Moving towards a fragrance/scent-safe environment

In order to protect those individuals with sensitivities to fragrances and scents, and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities, we are asking for your cooperation towards a 'fragrance/scent-safe' environment at this school. Employees, students and visitors are being requested to avoid the use of these products while at the school.

While it is recognized that it is a personal choice to use fragrances or scented products, the chemicals from these products are, by their very nature, shared as they vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled by others. Today's fragrances and scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

What can you do to help?

Be considerate of those who are sensitive to fragrances or scents. Avoid using these products in the school.

- If fragrances or scented products must be used, do so sparingly. A general guideline for fragrances and scented products is that they should not be detectable more than an arm's length away from you.
- Discuss this issue with your children.
- Please understand that this issue is not about you as a person or about your choice of fragrance or scent, but it is about the adverse reaction the use of the product may cause.

The success of our fragrance/scent-free initiative will depend upon the thoughtfulness, consideration, and cooperation of everyone within the school community.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Principal School

Appendix C

Sample Memo for Secondary Students

XXX School is instituting a 'FRAGRANCE/SCENT-SAFE' environment in our school effective DATE.

This requirement is a necessary response to a medical concern and will apply to all staff, students, parents, visitors, and volunteers who work or visit the school.

Background

Fragrances and scents are found in a wide range of products including perfume, aftershave, deodorant, and soap. Exposure to fragrances and other scented products may trigger adverse health reactions (e.g., asthma attack, anaphylactic reaction and shortness of breath).

Your cooperation is expected regarding the following:

- Avoid using fragrances or scented products such as perfume, cologne, body spray or scented soap while at school.
- If fragrances or scented products must be used, do so sparingly. A general guideline for fragrances and scented products is that they should not be detectable more than an arm's length away from you.

Please understand that this issue is about the serious adverse health reaction that can occur as a result of the product you are wearing.

The success of our fragrance/scent-free initiative will depend upon the thoughtfulness, consideration, and cooperation of everyone within the school community.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Principal School

Appendix D

Sample Memo to All Itinerant Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors including Childcare Programs
(full day, Before & After programs) and Community Outreach Programs



Grand Erie District School Board

Education Centre: 349 Erie Avenue, Brantford, Ontario N3T 5V3
(519) 756-6301 | granderie.ca | info@granderie.ca

TO: All Itinerant Staff, Volunteers, and Visitors

FROM: XXXX, Principal/Manager

DATE: XXXX

SUBJECT: Fragrance/Scent Safe School

Please be advised that there is a member of our school community who has a serious or life-threatening allergy to scents and/or fragrances.

In order to provide a safe environment, we are asking for co-operation from staff, students and visitors to avoid the use of fragrances or scented products while at the school.

Thank you for your co-operation

Appendix E

Sample Memo for Maintenance Grand Erie District School Board

**Grand Erie District School Board**

Education Centre: 349 Erie Avenue, Brantford, Ontario N3T 5V3
(519) 756-6301 | granderie.ca | info@granderie.ca

TO: Maintenance Services Staff and contractors
FROM: XXXX
DATE: XXXX
SUBJECT: Maintenance and Work Related Odours and Fragrance/Scent Safe Schools

Please be advised that there is an individual at School/Facility who has a serious or life-threatening allergy to a wide variety of chemicals (e.g., scents/fragrances, maintenance and plant related odours, such as soldering and cleaning chemicals).

Upon entering the School/Facility, it is required that all Maintenance Staff and Maintenance Contractors check in with the office staff/receptionist and the Head Custodian prior to starting work at this school each day. Please ensure that you speak to the office staff/receptionist; signing the logbook is not sufficient.

The office staff/receptionist will contact the employee to inform them that maintenance work is going to be performed. You will be advised when it is safe to proceed with your work.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Appendix F

Sample Memo for School Newsletter

We would like to remind parents and students that School is a fragrance/scent-safe environment. There are staff members and/or students who could suffer severe adverse reactions when exposed to even the smallest amount of a fragrance or scents. We ask that the community support us in our efforts to maintain a healthy and safe environment by refraining from wearing fragrances or scented products when visiting the school, even if your visit will be short.