

Policy for Developing a Scent-Free Workplace

Recommendations For Developing a Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace

Before initiating a scent-free policy, you may want to start an ongoing education program. Even on a small scale this provides a visible sign of the company's concern about the health of its employees. As employees become more aware of the adverse health effects caused by scented products and of positive ways of dealing with these problems, the atmosphere will become more favourable to change. Working together toward a successful resolution becomes a group effort.

Consider a range of attention-getters and events:

- Survey of employee opinions and suggestions (This can be an important initiative and provide key data for developing a scent-free policy)
- Posters, display, buttons
- Payroll stuffers such as brochures and relevant articles
- Regular articles in the company's newsletter
- Presentations about the health effects of scented products
- A plan of incentives encouraging the use of scent-free products

To Proceed

You can request the input and assistance of all employees in developing the policy. This sets the stage for action and involves everyone. Employee participation can take the form of a survey of opinions and suggestions, discussions at staff meetings and ideally, an employee committee which helps design the policy.

Consult union leadership from the very beginning; union reaction will significantly affect employee attitudes. Make a special effort to emphasize that you are developing a policy to promote employee health. Make it clear that you are requesting union assistance to ensure that the policy will be sensitive to the needs of all employees. Making your workplace scent-free is a health benefit for everyone.

Don't assume that some employees are not interested in protecting themselves from scented products just because they have not raised the issue. Surveys show that many employees feel awkward about bringing up the issue, even though the majority feel annoyed and uncomfortable when exposed to heavily scented products.

Go That Extra Step!

You may want to give serious thought to prohibiting scents in shared work spaces. In the end, this approach may be the easiest and most effective because it will have eliminated a major source of conflict between employees. If this strategy is not possible, consider phasing in scent restrictions over time through scent education campaigns.

Do not underestimate the willingness of employees to cooperate with restrictions on scented products. Experiences so far show overwhelming acceptance of such restrictions.

Put It in Writing

Draw up a formal, written scent-free policy, or guideline. Keep it simple, yet specific. Make it clear that this is a beginning and they can review the policy, alter - even expand - because of your company's experience.

Keep employees updated throughout the development process, especially if you will be giving them the opportunity to provide continued input.

Be sure to emphasize to employees that the scent-free policy has the solid backing of top management and, if appropriate, union leadership.

Send every employee a copy of the new policy before the effective date. Direct supervisors to go over the policy with employees at staff meetings so they can resolve any questions or problems in advance.

Be sure you put the policy in writing. Plan to have the policy carried out uniformly throughout the organization. Avoid allowing each department to establish its own policy.

PLAN OF ACTION

Initial Planning

1. Assign overall responsibility for developing the policy to a single individual, preferably a member of senior or middle management.
2. Appoint an advisory committee composed of managers, union representatives and staff employees who will assist the lead person in developing recommendations.
3. Set a time line for developing and implementing the scent-free policy.
4. Hold an advisory committee meeting to:
 - Review Lung Association and other materials on scented products and their effects.
 - Discuss company characteristics, which will affect the policy's content and format.
 - Plan how to obtain employee input (formal survey, discussions at staff meetings).
 - Request suggested questions for employee survey and/or topics for discussion at staff meetings.

Employee Survey

- Prepare employee survey and/or discussion guidelines.
- Inform all employees of the company's plans to establish, or investigate, a scent-free policy.
- Distribute an employee survey and/or instruct all supervisors to hold discussions according to the guidelines.
- Compile results of the employee survey/discussions.

Sample Survey (You might want to adapt this employee survey to your particular situation)

1. Please indicate how often you are bothered by perfume, aftershave, or scents at work:

- Frequently ?
- Occasionally ?
- Seldom ?
- Never ?

2. If scents bother you at work, in what way are you bothered? (You can check more than one)

- My clothes and/or hair smell
- Stinging eyes ?
- Coughing ?
- Headaches ?
- Interferes with work performance ?
- Concern for long term health effects ?
- Triggers allergies ?
- Triggers asthma ?
- Not at all bothered by scents ?
- Other, please describe:

3. Do you currently wear scented products (perfume, cologne, aftershave etc.) to work?

- Yes?
- No ?

4. Would you be willing to stop wearing scented products to work if you knew it was affecting the health of others around you?

- Yes ?
- No ?

5. How many employees are there in your immediate work area?

- 1-5 ?
- 6-10 ?
- 11 or more ?

6. How many employees in your immediate work area use heavily scented products?

- None ?
- 1-5?
- 6-10?

7. Are you?

- Male ?
- Female ?

8. Are you?...

- Management ?
- Non-management ?

9. Additional Comments:

When Scented Products are Allowed in Shared Work Spaces

If you decide to permit mildly scented products in areas where sensitive and non-sensitive employees work together, a plan should be initiated to protect sensitive individuals to the greatest extent possible.

The degree of discomfort experienced by sensitive individuals in a scented environment depends on their personal sensitivity and the concentrations of the various chemicals in their vicinity. A significant percentage of the population (those suffering from existing respiratory disease) is hypersensitive to scented products. Even most non-sensitive individuals suffer from eye and nose irritation at low concentrations of these chemical irritants.

The concentration of irritants is related to the:

- number of scented products present
- room volume
- proportion of fresh air
- efficiency of air-cleaning equipment
- effectiveness of air-mixing in the room
- absorption characteristics of building materials and furnishings.

If there seems to be insurmountable problems with scented products in shared work areas, the easiest and most effective solution would be to prohibit all scents in such places.

Example Policy One

This is an example of a scent-free policy where there is a clear delineation of where scented products are prohibited and where they are permitted and offers guidelines for conflict resolution. This policy's drawback is that it allows scents in areas where sensitive and non-sensitive employees work together.

The policy could begin with the following paragraph:

XYZ POLICY CONCERNING SCENTED PRODUCTS

Medical evidence clearly shows that scented products are harmful to the health of sensitive individuals. In sufficient concentrations scented products may be harmful to those with allergies, environmental sensitivity or chronic heart or lung disease.

In considering the health needs and concerns of those sensitive and non-sensitive employees alike and to provide a healthy working environment for every employee, this company policy will take effect on (day, month, year) a date which marks the beginning of our new fiscal year. All employees, customers and visitors are expected to comply with the scent-free regulations detailed in this policy.

SCENT-FREE AREAS

- Fire or emergency escape routes
- Common areas, including elevators, hallways, stairwells, lobbies, waiting rooms, copier rooms, mail rooms, auditoriums, reception areas, customer service areas, employee lounges, and rest rooms
- Classrooms and conference rooms
- Computer, production and manufacturing areas

Example Policy Two

This second example of a scent-free policy reflects the direction in which our society is moving. It acknowledges scent-free spaces as the norm and communicates the value the company places on employee health and comfort. Scents are prohibited throughout the company's premises.

XYZ POLICY CONCERNING SCENTED PRODUCTS

In Canada today more than one in four individuals suffers from respiratory disease. A full 40 of these individuals have allergic triggers to their disease. Medical evidence clearly shows that scented products are harmful to the health of sensitive individuals. In sufficient concentrations scented products may be harmful to those with allergies, environmental sensitivity or chronic heart or lung disease.

XYZ Company is dedicated to providing a healthy, comfortable and productive work environment for our employees. We can achieve this goal only through ongoing efforts to protect sensitive individuals and to help employees adjust to restrictions on scented products. Effective (day, month, year) scented products are prohibited throughout company facilities.