

PSAC Policy on Scent-Free Environments

Many individuals experience various degrees of physical effects from exposure to scented products, such as perfumes and colognes. Sometimes, it might be a headache or nausea when passing by a department store's perfume counter or riding in an elevator with someone wearing a certain fragrance. However, a growing number of people are developing more severe reactions to these and many other types of products and chemicals.

This condition is known as multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) or Environmental Illness (EI). In this Policy, this condition will be referred to as "Environmental Disabilities". Environmental Disabilities affect people who have developed an acute sensitivity to various chemicals in the environment. Persons with these disabilities experience a range of debilitating physical reactions, some even life-threatening, to chemicals used in a variety of products, including fragrances and personal care products; deodorizers and cleaners; pesticides, wall and floor coverings; and building materials.

It's a complex issue with a variety of triggering agents and physical reactions. Different people are affected by different products in different ways. The common factor is the physical reaction. It can be very strong and severely disabling.

In Canada today, more than one in four individuals suffers from respiratory disease. At least 40% of these individuals experience 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 sensitivities or chronic heart or lung diseases.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada is committed to ensuring that all members with disabilities are able to effectively participate in order to contribute to the organization's mandate.

In this regard, the Alliance recognizes that accessibility is an essential requirement for the participation of members with environmental disabilities.

In consideration for the health of our colleagues who may suffer from environmental disabilities, and with the goal of eliminating a contaminant from the air, **the PSAC requests that all participants attending any union function refrain from using scented products. These include scented perfumes, colognes, lotions, hairsprays, deodorants and other products promoted by the fragrance industry.**

We believe that this policy will provide a more comfortable environment for all and, in the larger scheme of things, help promote greater awareness of environmental disability.

There are many ways to help eliminate workplace barriers to fellow workers who have environmental disabilities and to make it easier for them to work productively.

Remember that although environmental disabilities may be non-evident, they are required by law to be accommodated like any other disability.

The policy also requires that, before any union event or function, **anyone suffering from environmental disabilities needs to self-identify with those organizing the meeting, course or event.**

A participant who notices a problem is required to address the person in a cordial and respectful manner. Any unresolved issues would then be brought to the attention of the organizers who will investigate and attempt to find suitable accommodation up to the point of undue hardship.

Our scent-free policy statement should be communicated in advance to all participants.

By working together we can create healthier environments for ALL, and accommodate the needs of persons who have environmental disabilities.

This policy should be a complement to our three other publications relating to this issue:

- PSAC Awareness Kit on Scent-Free Environments (1998)
- PSAC Booklet on Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) at Work (1997)
- PSAC Duty to Accommodate Booklet: A PSAC Guide for Local Representatives

They are information guides to assist members in understanding better the issue.

A PSAC video entitled “It’s Not in Your Head” was also produced a few years ago. This video offers information on the complexities of MCS and on how to help members suffering from environmental disabilities.

You are encouraged to distribute to all employees copies of these PSAC publications.

(Adopted at the NBoD – January 2006)