

The Air We Breathe:

The Case for Fragrance-Free Schools

WOMEN 
for a Healthy
ENVIRONMENT

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The Air We Breathe: The Case for Fragrance-Free Schools

WHAT'S IN A FRAGRANCE?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Synthetic fragrance is added to practically every product we use on a daily basis, and may be made up of more than 3,000 different chemicals—the majority of which have not been tested for safety.

Yet manufacturers are not required to disclose the chemicals that make up fragrance because fragrance is protected by federal regulations as a trade secret.

Because of the proliferation of synthetic fragrance in the products we use, many people have become sensitive to fragrance. It is estimated that indoor environmental quality-related health issues in the workplace cost billions of dollars each year due to lost productivity, decreased performance and absenteeism.

School students, teachers, administrators and staff who spend a substantial part of their days in school buildings should have access to clean indoor air, free of fragrances.

This resource guide details the current situation and outlines ways school administration can begin to create fragrance-free schools that will benefit the health of all their constituents. This guide was made possible through a generous grant provided by the Highmark Foundation.

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WHAT'S IN A FRAGRANCE?

THE FRAGRANCE MYSTERY REVEALED

There is a mystery ingredient found in hundreds—if not thousands—of the consumer products we use every day, ranging from personal care items, such as soaps, lotions and shampoos, to room deodorizers and carpet cleaners, to laundry detergents and fabric softeners. That mystery ingredient is **fragrance**.

Because manufacturers are not required to disclose the chemicals that make up this ingredient because fragrance is protected as trade secrets by loopholes in federal regulation, they are identified only as “fragrance” or “parfum” in product ingredient labeling. However, these synthetic fragrances can include a selection of more than 3,000 different chemicals, the majority of which have not been tested for safety.

WHY FRAGRANCES AT ALL?

Perfumes were originally used to mask odors when running water was not available. Today, perfumes and other scented products are used to elicit an emotional response. Manufacturers generally add scent to products for branding reasons. Consumers become addicted to the scent and become brand loyal. However, scent has nothing to do with how well a product works.

Last fall, Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE) launched a campaign requesting Procter & Gamble to fully disclose the fragrance ingredients in its Febreze line of products. More than 7,000 people took action and signed our petition. We know this issue affects many people each and every day.

Exposure to fragranced products can pose significant health risks, as demonstrated by compromised respiratory conditions (breathing difficulties), neurologic responses (such as dizziness and headaches), skin irritations (hives and itching) and allergic reactions (runny nose and watery eyes). Fragrance often contains phthalates (pronounced *thal-ates*), which bind the scent in a product to make it last longer. Scientific studies have demonstrated phthalates impact our hormones and reproductive development. Other studies suggest that phthalates are linked to asthma and skin diseases in children.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 18.7 million people are affected with asthma in the United States and it is estimated that one in five has tested positive to one or more allergens. Many of the fragranced consumer and personal care products we use contain sensitizing agents that trigger serious health effects.

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WHAT'S IN A FRAGRANCE?

WHAT'S NOT HEALTHY FOR PEOPLE ALSO IS NOT GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Over the past 50 years, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration indicates that 80 percent to 90 percent of fragrances have been synthesized from petroleum, and some of the commonly found harmful chemicals in fragranced products include acetone, phenol, toluene, benzyl acetate and limonene. Fragranced products, such as air fresheners, contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—chemicals that keep the fragrance molecules airborne so the fragrances linger longer and reduce indoor air quality.

FRAGRANCE IN THE WORKPLACE/SCHOOLS

It's especially important to be mindful of fragrance in the workplace and school settings. It has been estimated that indoor environmental quality-related health issues cost businesses in the range of \$20 billion to \$70 billion annually due to lost productivity, decreased performance, and absences from illness. For some individuals, breathing in fragrances is similar to breathing in secondhand smoke.

Recent legal actions have forced employers to clean up personal air space. In 2010, Susan McBride was awarded \$100,000 by the U.S. District Court under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when a coworker's perfume created a breathing problem. The settlement names the city of Detroit, all employees and agents of the city as those who must abide by the new fragrance-free policy.

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WHAT'S IN A FRAGRANCE?

SOME SIMPLE STEPS FOR CREATING A FRAGRANCE-FREE ENVIRONMENT:

AT WORK OR SCHOOL

1. Request that employees refrain from wearing scented products (especially products where the sole purpose is to produce a scent) and strongly scented personal care products.
2. Use fragrance-free janitorial products.
3. Avoid unscented products (they contain chemicals that mask the scent) and synthetic musks, such as tonalide and galaxolide, that impact both our health and environment.
4. Designate areas of a public facility as non-scented/fragrance-free zones.
5. Educate employees by placing posters about fragrance sensitivity around the office.
6. Discuss a fragrance-free workplace policy with your human resources department.
7. Visit the WHE website for examples of fragrance-free workplace policies.
8. Take caution when selecting unscented or fragrance-free products and read ingredients. Sometimes these products contain a masking chemical that will be listed as "fragrance."

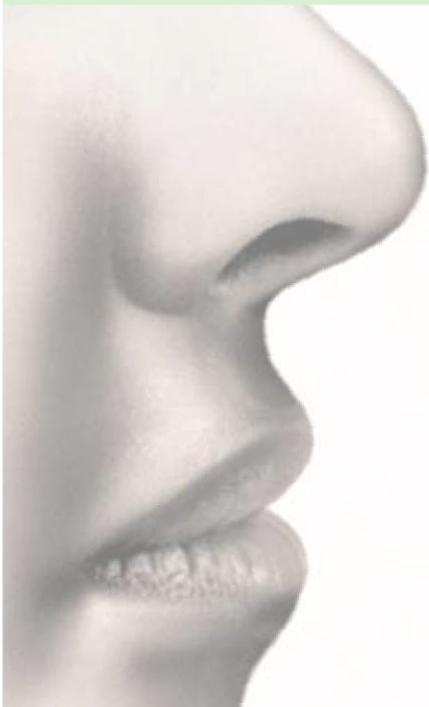
AT HOME

1. Seek natural personal care products and cleaning products that are less toxic and don't contain the ingredients "fragrance" or "parfum," and look for essential oils as ingredients in personal care products.
2. Use plant-based, biodegradable and non-toxic cleaning products like vinegar and baking soda. Skip the fabric softener and dryer sheets!
3. Eliminate the use of car or home air fresheners. If you must use a candle, choose one made from soy or beeswax, rather than a paraffin wax. You can also simmer cloves or cinnamon sticks on the stove or look for a fragrant plant.
4. Be mindful of children and pets. They are closest to the ground and have greatest exposure to cleaning products that may contain harmful chemicals.

To download a brochure, view WHE's fragrance-free workplace presentation, or contact us to develop a policy, visit: www.WomenForAHealthyEnvironment.org/pages/fragrance-free-day.

OTHER RESOURCES:

Job Accommodation Network: *Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Fragrance Sensitivity*
Environmental Protection Agency: *Indoor Air Quality, Healthy School Environments, Creating Healthy Indoor Environments in Schools*
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Multifaceted Approach to Assess Indoor Environmental Quality*
American Lung Association: *School Districts and Schools*
Healthy Schools Campaign: *Indoor Air Quality in Schools, Green Clean Schools*



Indoor Air Quality and Actions

Facts about indoor air quality and some easy steps schools can take to minimize chemical exposure.

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Indoor Air Quality and Actions

FACT:

More than 53 million children and 6 million adults in America spend significant amounts of time in more than 120,000 school buildings across the country.

THE ISSUE:

- School buildings can contain harmful contaminants and chemicals that impede learning and overall health.
- Indoor air quality problems can exacerbate existing respiratory issues in children and adults. Approximately 25 percent of chemicals in school cleaning products are considered toxic and contribute to poor indoor air quality.
- School occupants can be exposed to improperly used or stored chemicals through:
 - Inhalation—aerosols, vapors, fumes or dusts can be inhaled, causing breathing problems, and/or absorbed into the bloodstream
 - Skin contact—residues from chemicals can damage skin by burning skin tissue or by being absorbed through the skin and carried to body organs, resulting in dryness, redness, or dermatitis
 - Ingestion—although rare, children can accidentally eat chemicals via hand-to-mouth contact
- Since 1976, more than 85,000 synthetic chemicals have been introduced into commerce and used in consumer products, including cleaning items. Only 200 chemicals have been reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency for safety, and only five have been regulated. As a result, there are harmful chemicals in everyday products that have been shown through scientific study to impact human health and the environment.
- Studies have shown that certain cleaning products used in the school setting contain chemicals identified as potential asthmagens (triggers of asthma symptoms), allergens, carcinogens and air contaminants. (EWG Study)
- Industrial-strength cleaning products and room deodorizers used in schools can contribute to indoor air pollution. These products can be dangerous to use around children—especially those with sensitive airways or other health problems— and hazardous to the cleaning staff who handle them directly.
- Manufacturers generally add scent to products for branding reasons to encourage people to become addicted to the scent and become brand loyal. It is important to note that scent has nothing to do with how well a product works.
- We know that healthy students are better able to learn and thrive in an environment free of toxins.

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Indoor Air Quality and Actions

THE CURRENT SITUATION:

- Schools are becoming increasingly aware that healthy and environmentally friendly facilities foster academic achievement and staff well-being.
- Green cleaning practices promote a healthier community and reduce exposure to chemicals by protecting students, teachers and staff, while ensuring that buildings are maintained in an efficient and cost-effective way.
- As states have begun to enact air-quality policies, many more eco-friendly products have become available for school use. To date, 12 states and the District of Columbia (DC) have passed legislation to advance green cleaning in schools and more eco-friendly products have become available for school use.
- Green cleaning involves the use of cleaning products that work effectively while minimizing adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

THE SOLUTION:

- Keep the dirt out by installing dirt-grabbing walk-off mats inside and outside entrances for a recommended 15 to 20 feet.
- Update and maintain cleaning equipment for optimal performance.
- Switch to microfiber cloths and mops, which are highly effective at picking up dirt.
- Replace old vacuums with high efficiency particulate absorption (HEPA) vacuums which use filters to trap fine particles, such as pollen and dust mite feces, that may trigger allergy and asthma symptoms.
- Install high-filtration vacuum attachments on other floor-care equipment
- Sanitizing—reducing germs on surfaces—often is enough for most areas and surfaces.
- Disinfecting—destroying or inactivating germs—is needed only for high-risk areas or surfaces (door knobs, key pads, etc.)
- Use a little elbow grease and a mild all-purpose cleaner to remove germs from most surfaces.

PURCHASE WISELY:

- Green cleaning is designed to reduce indoor air pollution by using less-toxic cleaning chemicals and equipment that is more effective at capturing particulate matter. Green cleaning products can be as effective as traditional cleaning products and can be competitively priced to be essentially cost-neutral when compared to their traditional counterparts.
- Many manufacturers and retailers are using terms such as “environmentally safe,” “green,” “non-

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Indoor Air Quality and Actions

toxic” and similar phrases to boost sales. Some of these claims are valid; many are not. Choose products that are rated “green” by independent third-party organizations.

- Schools can rely on third party certifiers to evaluate products against specific criteria and ensure that they work. Use less toxic, third-party certified, all-purpose cleaners, paper products and hand soaps.

THE BENEFITS:

According to the Healthy Schools Campaign, a well-designed green cleaning program can:

- Help students stay healthy and learn—Green cleaning reduces the environmental hazards that can negatively affect children’s health and development.
- Protect custodial staff—Custodial staff members, especially women of child-bearing age, are particularly susceptible to health problems.
- Increase facility and furniture lifespan—Proper maintenance and effective cleaning without caustic chemicals prevents damage and premature aging.
- Preserve the environment—Green cleaning preserves natural resources and reduces the amount of harmful chemicals washed into lakes and streams.
- Save money—School leaders often report short and long-term savings as they switch to green cleaning and reduce the number of cleaning products.

Taken from the Healthy Schools Campaign <http://healthyschoolscampaign.org/programs/green-clean-schools>

SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Cleaning for Healthy Schools: *Cleaning for Healthy Schools Toolkit*

ECOLOGO: *Cleaning Products*

Environmental Protection Agency: *Protecting Students and Staff with Green Cleaning*

Green Schools Initiative: *Cleaning for Asthma Safe Schools (CLASS): The Green Cleaning Toolkit*

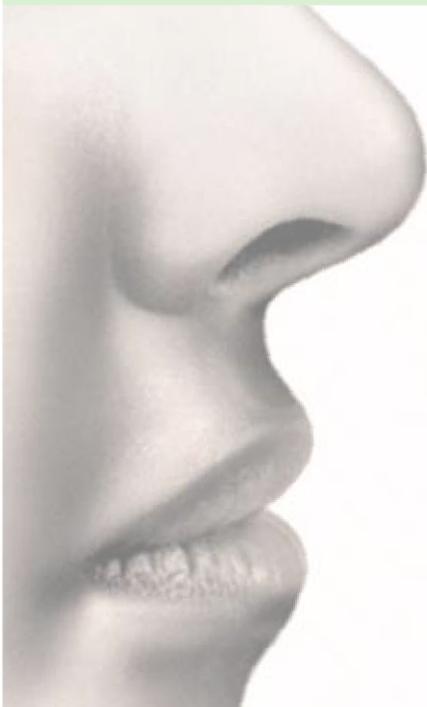
Green Seal: *Green Seal certified janitorial products*

Healthy Schools Campaign: *The Quick + Easy Guide to Green Cleaning in Schools*

Healthy Schools Network: *Guide to Green Cleaning*

Public Health Institute: *Green Cleaning in Schools: A Guide for Advocates*

Responsible Purchasing Network: *Cleaners: Products*



Sample Policies and Parent Letter

Suggested wording for starting a fragrance-free initiative in your school.

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Sample Policies and Parent Letters

SAMPLE POLICIES:

[School District] has students, parents and staff with health conditions that are, at times, severely affected by fragrances. Because chemically sensitive individuals may react to different products with widely varying degrees of severity, it is difficult to ensure a consistently comfortable and accommodating learning and working environment under every conceivable set of circumstances.

Fragranced products can cause some people with chronic illnesses to suffer additional symptoms and medical expenses. Symptoms include asthma, allergies, sinus problems, rhinitis and migraine headaches. In an effort to minimize the barriers and difficulties experienced in schools and offices by employees, students, parents and community members who have chemical and fragrance sensitivities, **[School District]** respectfully requests that all school buildings and school-sponsored events remain free of chemical-based scented products. These products include: perfume, cologne, aftershave, body spray, scented lotion, fragranced hair products, room deodorizers, air fresheners and other related products. We appreciate your cooperation in making **[School District]** a healthy and safe learning and working environment for all.”

OR

The academic success of a student can be directly linked to his or her health. For this reason, it is imperative that **[School District]** ensures the wellbeing and safety of all its students to support a positive learning environment.

In order to create a safer learning environment for students, as well as a safer working environment for staff, **[School District]** intends to protect the indoor and outdoor air quality of its campuses. Strong scents and fragrances can contribute to poor indoor air quality that can be unhealthy to students and school staff. Many people experience unpleasant physical effects from scented products and a growing number of people suffer more severe reactions to these types of products and chemicals. This condition is known as multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS) and involves people who have developed an acute sensitivity to various chemicals in the environment. People with MCS experience a range of debilitating or even life-threatening physical reactions to chemicals used in a variety of scented materials, including fragrances and chemical products.

When scented products have been suspected to adversely affect a person’s health, some or all of the following symptoms are reported:

- Headaches
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Malaise (discomfort)
- Loss of appetite
- Upper respiratory symptoms
- Difficulty concentrating
- Numbness
- Shortness of breath
- Skin irritation

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Sample Policies and Parent Letters

Persons with allergies or asthma, as well as those with other conditions, report that certain odors, even in small amounts, can trigger an episode. Some people may report mild irritation while others are incapacitated and must give up many “normal” activities (such as going to public places) to avoid exposure.

All teachers, students and staff members are asked not to bring cleaning products, deodorizers or other personal care products into the schools unless they are identified as fragrance-free. In addition, cleaning products with strong scents will only be used during off-peak school hours. Students, parents and staff will be notified if strongly scented cleaning materials will be used on the campus. If a student or employee is affected by a specific scent, we ask that school staff eliminate the cause of the offensive odor.

Under this policy, **[School District]** also requests that students and staff refrain from wearing perfume, cologne, body sprays and other fragranced products (where the sole purpose is to produce a scent), in order to promote a fragrance-free environment. This request is included in notices and on displayed signage throughout the school buildings. Fragranced products can include: hand sanitizers, cologne, perfume, scented lotions, hair products, candles, air fresheners, plug-ins, **[Additional Items That School Identifies]**.

(American Lung Association - Guide to Asthma Policy for Housing and Schools)

<http://action.lung.org/site/DocServer/fragrance-free-policy-sample-updated.pdf>

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Sample Policies and Parent Letters

SAMPLE PARENT LETTER

Date

Dear Parent,

[School District] is pleased to announce that we are implementing a new initiative this year that addresses improving air quality in our schools. As you may be aware, there are many scented and fragranced products that our students and faculty encounter each day that impact the air our school community breathes. Many of these products contain ingredients known to trigger allergy and asthma symptoms. In addition, individuals can experience other health effects from these products, including headaches and migraines, hives and itching.

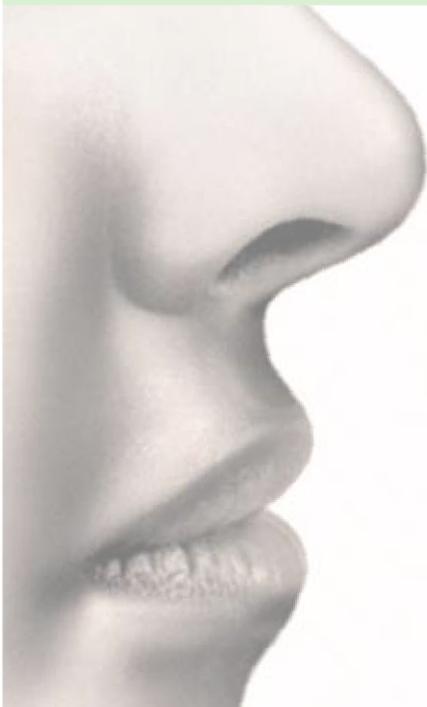
According to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, asthma is a leading chronic illness among children and adolescents in the United States and one of the leading causes of school absenteeism. On average, in a classroom of 30 children, about 3 (or 1 in 10) are likely to have asthma. We are increasingly becoming aware of students experiencing negative health effects from using fragranced products (particularly body sprays) in confined spaces, such as locker rooms, that lack adequate ventilation.

To be proactive and better protect the health of our school community, **[School District]** has implemented a "Fragrance-Free School" program, which includes the adoption of a Fragrance-Free School guidance document that will be included in the student handbook. All schools, including classrooms, offices and locker rooms, will remain free of chemical-based scented products. These products include: perfume, cologne, aftershave, body spray, scented lotion, fragranced hair spray, room deodorizers, air fresheners and/or other related products.

Signage will be placed in our school entryways, administrative offices and nurses' offices to educate and inform students, faculty and visitors about this new initiative. Further, we will be applying this program to our own purchasing practices. **[School District]** will eliminate air fresheners in the schools and revise its "back to school" supplies list for parents to encourage fragrance-free materials. In addition, we will begin to analyze our cleaning supplies to promote a healthier environment for our school community.

In advance, we thank you and look forward to your cooperation in this new initiative, as we strive to continually maintain and promote a healthy learning environment for your children.

Sincerely,



Sample Support Materials

Sample material and activities for educating and encouraging engagement with the fragrance-free initiatives among various audiences, including parents and students.

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Sample Support Materials

Suggested wording for teachers to add to existing back-to-school supplies lists to encourage parents to send in fragrance-free supplies

Back-to-School Supplies List

- *Hand sanitizer – triclosan-free and fragrance-free*
- *Hand wipes – chlorine-free and fragrance-free*
- Tissues
- Crayons
- #2 Pencils
- Colored Pencils
- Markers
- Highlighters
- Glue Sticks
- Post-It Note

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Sample Support Materials

Sample activity to educate students on the district's fragrance-free initiative

Fragrance-Free Word Search

E V A H S R E T F A D G F A I
 E C B S Q I G C G Y E N N S X
 H C T O N T L P H P T I E T P
 Y E N D D E N T M O N H E H U
 K G O A A Y L E S R E C R M W
 R O R N R A S L C N C T G A R
 R O I E E G A P V S S I Y I S
 Z N R H L C A I R A N O A J N
 G Z P J I L R R C A U N H A E
 P S H M N O A T F O Y O Y X E
 R Q E O N P H T H A L A T E Z
 V H Z M P E R F U M E O C L I
 C Y E N O I T O L S V N G Y N
 F N Y M V O C I H D A S N N G
 T C I X O T N O N P G D A E E

AFTERSHAVE
 AIR
 ALLERGY
 ASTHMA
 BODYSPRAY
 CHEMICALS
 CLEANING
 COLOGNE
 ENVIRONMENT
 FRAGRANCE
 GREEN
 HEALTHY
 INDOOR
 ITCHING
 LOTION
 NONTOXIC
 PERFUME
 PHTHALATE
 SCENT
 SNEEZING
 UNSCENTED
 VOC

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Sample Support Materials

Sample activity for students to try in the classroom or at home, with adult supervision.

ALTERNATIVES TO CHEMICAL SCENTS FOR TWEENS AND TEENS

Not all fragrance comes from chemicals! Many fragrances come naturally from plants and fruits, and can be combined to make safe, aromatic scents.

Here are some do-it-yourself recipes. Most of these essential oils can be found online and at local health food stores or pharmacies.

Try one of these recipes using essential oils or experiment to create your own signature scent!

Supplies: 1 oz (or 2 oz) glass bottle, pipette (for measuring essential oils)

Eau-de-cologne

8 drops bergamot
1 drop orange
7 drops lemon
2 drops lavender
5 ml water
120 ml alcohol

Cologne for men

5 drops lavender
10 drops coriander
11 drops sandalwood
11 drops cedarwood
2 drops frankincense
50 ml alcohol

'All alive' perfume

2 drops sweet orange
5 drops lemon
3 drops tangerine
4 drops frankincense
1 drop myrrh
6 ml alcohol

Calming perfume

4 drops jasmine
2 drops lemon
1 drops patchouli

Mysterious

8 drops sandalwood
3 drops lavender
1 drop cedarwood

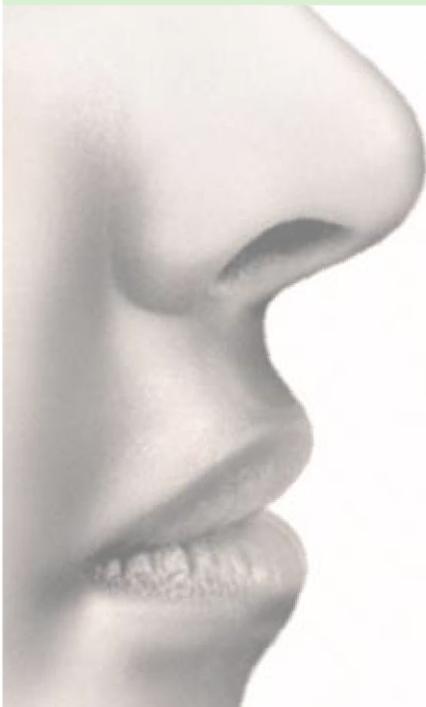
Luscious Lavender

6 drops lavender
4 drops frankincense
1 drop rose geranium

Upbeat n' Happy

5 drops bergamot
5 drops grapefruit
1 drop rose/geranium





Glossary of Terms

Sample material and activities for educating and encouraging engagement with the fragrance-free initiatives among various audiences, including parents and students.

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Student Activities

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AFTERSHAVE – lotion, gel, balm, powder or liquid used mainly by men after they have finished shaving.

AIR – the name given to the Earth’s atmosphere.

ALLERGY – hypersensitivity disorder of the human body’s immune system, affecting 20percent of the population.

ASTHMA – a chronic (long-term) lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways, affecting 1 in 10 students.

BODY SPRAY – a perfume product, similar to aerosol deodorant, which is intended to be used on the body.

CHEMICAL – form of matter that has constant chemical composition and characteristic properties. A fragranced product may contain any combination of more than 3,000 different chemicals.

CLEANING – work done in the school to make it safe for students and staff. Cleaning products should be fragrance-free.

COLOGNE – A scented water worn on the body. It contains a lower concentration of essential oils than perfume.

ENVIRONMENT (built) – constructed surroundings (such as a school) that provide the setting for human activity, ranging from the large-scale civic surroundings to the personal places.

FRAGRANCE – a chemical compound that has a smell or odor. Companies are not required to list on a consumer product any of the chemicals that make up the ingredient “fragrance.”

GREEN – term used to describe products that are intended to not harm human health and the environment (also referred to as eco-friendly or nature-friendly).

HEALTHY – having good health, not sick or injured.

INDOOR – intended for use in the interior of a building. Indoor air quality (IAQ) is a term that refers to the air quality within and around buildings and structures, especially as it relates to the health and comfort of a building’s (such as a school’s) occupants.

ITCHING – one of the side effects people experience from using fragranced products.

LOTION – a topical cream intended to be applied to unbroken skin that is instantly absorbed to provide moisturization.

NONTOXIC – not of, relating to or caused by a toxin or poison; safe.

PERFUME – a mixture of fragrant essential oils or aroma compounds, fixatives and solvents used to give the human body, animals, food, objects and living spaces “a pleasant scent,” typically worn by women.

PHTHALATE – hidden chemical in fragrance that binds the scent in a product to make it last longer. Phthalates have been linked to various health effects.

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Student Activities

SCENT – a distinctive odor that may be pleasant or unpleasant.

SNEEZING – one of the side effects from using scented products.

UNSCENTED – products may be labeled unscented; however, they may still contain “fragrance” as an ingredient to mask any odors.

VOC (volatile organic compound) – chemicals used in most consumer products that can easily evaporate into the air we breathe and reduces indoor air quality.