

What stinks about Fragrances?



Fragrance is found in 96 percent of shampoos, 91 percent of antiperspirants and 95 percent of shaving products. – *Secret Scents: How Hidden Fragrance Allergens Harm Public Health* released by Women's Voices for the Earth.

Consumer products like air fresheners, candles, detergents, soaps, lotions and household cleaners contain synthetic fragrances which may include:

Allergens and sensitizers

Fragrances are considered to be among the top five known allergens and are known to trigger asthma attacks.

Synthetic musks

Preliminary research suggests that musks such as galaxolide and tonalide may disrupt hormones.

Phthalates

Fragrance often contains phthalates (pronounced *thal-ates*), which bind the scent in a product to make it last longer. Scientific studies have demonstrated that phthalates impact our hormones and reproductive development. Other studies suggest that phthalates are linked to asthma and skin diseases in children.

What's in the bottle?

There is a mystery ingredient found in most 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 fragrance is a trade secret protected by federal regulation, the thousands of chemicals and combinations of chemicals that add scent to personal care products are identified only as **fragrance** or **parfum** in product ingredient labeling. And while personal care products must disclose a list of ingredients other than fragrance, consumer products like household cleaners, air fresheners and scented candles are not required to disclose ingredients at all.

Synthetic fragrances can include a selection of more than 3,000 different chemicals, the majority of which have not been tested for safety.

The Risks

Exposure to fragranced products can pose significant health risks, causing a range of conditions such as compromised respiratory systems, neurologic responses, skin irritations, and allergic reactions. According to a Canadian Community Health Survey in 2005, approximately 1.2 million Canadians have multiple chemical sensitivities or related illnesses, many of which are due to exposure to fragrance. Some or all of the following symptoms are typically reported: headaches, dizziness, nausea, weakness, loss of appetite, breathing difficulties, runny nose, watery eyes, difficulty concentrating, numbness, hives, itching.

www.ecosuperior.org
P: 807 624 2140 F: 807 622 0005
562 Red River Road, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 1H3


ecosuperior
ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

Making sense of scents

Read product labels carefully and choose products that do not include fragrance or parfum in the ingredient list.

Further information

Pick up fact sheets about the following topics at our office, or download them from www.ecosuperior.org under Publications/Resources:

- **Choosing Safer Personal Care Products**
- **Housecleaning without Harm**

Visit the Environmental Working Group's website for product databases so you can make more informed choices: www.ewg.org

Sources

The Air We Breathe: The Case for Fragrance-Free Schools. Women for a Healthy Environment.

Secret Scents: How Hidden Fragrance Allergens Harm Public Health. Women's Voices for the Earth.

The Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & Environment's online resource for fragrance: http://www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/sites/healthyenvironmentforkids.ca/files/CPCHE_FactsFragrancesEN.pdf

Scented vs. unscented

Avoiding fragrance requires a critical eye. These terms are commonly found on product labels, but they don't always mean there is no added fragrance: **Unscented** or **Fragrance-free** often mean that a product has no odour, but synthetic ingredients may have been added to mask the smell of the product.

Tips for creating a scent-free space at home

- Avoid using scented products during pregnancy and on babies and children.
- Use plant-based, non-toxic cleaning products like vinegar and water for cleaning floors, windows and surfaces. Baking soda is a handy scouring powder for sinks and tubs.
- Skip the fabric softener and dryer sheets! Choose laundry detergents with no added fragrance.
- Eliminate the use of car and home air fresheners. If you use candles, choose one made from soy or beeswax instead of paraffin wax (a toxic petroleum by-product). Avoid scented candles. Try simmering cloves or cinnamon sticks on the stove or look for a fragrant plant.
- Be mindful of children and pets. They are closest to the ground and have the greatest exposure to cleaning products that may contain harmful chemicals.

Tips for creating a scent-free space at work or school

- Discuss a fragrance-free workplace policy with your human resources department.
- Request that employees refrain from wearing perfume or cologne.
- Use janitorial products with no added fragrance.
- Educate employees by placing posters about chemical sensitivity around the office.
- Designate areas of a public facility as fragrance-free zones with signage.

www.ecosuperior.org
P: 807 624 2140 | F: 807 622 0005
562 Red River Road, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 1H3

