

No scents is good sense

Environmental sensitivities are gaining recognition as a health and disability issue. Many workplaces are taking proactive steps to create accessible environments for scent-sensitive and otherwise chemically sensitive employees and clients. Schools are also working to ensure that staff and students are able to participate fully in the classroom without experiencing the adverse effects of exposure to environmental irritants.



The NSTU Guidebook 2014/2015 states that public schools and educational sites in Nova Scotia must be “scent-sensitive places of learning and working.” The Guidebook affirms the NSTU’s commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy workplace and preventing illness and injury by prioritizing concerns regarding scented and other off-gassing products, and by requesting that NSTU members not wear scented personal care products at NSTU functions or in the workplace.

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, people who say scented products have a negative impact on their health report symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue, difficulty breathing, and skin irritation. People with asthma and those with allergies have reported a heightened sensitivity to scents.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission classifies environmental or chemical sensitivity as a disability. People who experience this condition are entitled to human rights protection and accommodation by their employer. Illness caused by exposure to scented products at work has been recognized as a compensable injury in Nova Scotia.

If you believe the use of scented products or other environmental irritants is an issue at your workplace, you should bring your concerns to the attention of your administration. If you are not satisfied with its response, you should then bring your concerns to the Joint Occupational Health and Safety (JOHS) Committee, and ask the Committee to make specific recommendations to the administration in writing. The administration must respond within 21 days. If the JOHS Committee has not addressed your concerns adequately, you may bring your concerns to an Officer with the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour.

The NSTU encourages members to be proactive in creating and maintaining a healthy and accessible work environment, and to contact their NSTU Staff Officer for assistance at any time. An NSTU Staff Officer can help members obtain timely and effective responses from administrators, the JOHS Committee, or the Department of Labour, and can help ensure a member’s concerns are addressed satisfactorily, or help a member file a grievance if necessary.

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