Sensitive to Scents

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

In a world filled with scented soap, fragrant shampoo and sweet-smelling perfume, staying upwind can be a constant challenge. For anyone sensitive to scents, the workplace can be downright hazardous to your health.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Fragrances are everywhere, in everything and on everyone – or so it seems. Today, despite increased awareness about chemicals and their impact, aromas are added to everything from diapers to toilet tissue and cleaning products.

For people with allergies, asthma or a sensitivity to scents, fragrances can cause a host of adverse reactions including headache and nausea, tightening of the throat, shortness of breath and wheezing. Although a person may be allergic to just one of the hundreds of chemicals in a cologne or perfume, it is virtually impossible to know which one.

EXAMPLE
Employers are not legally required to implement fragrance-free policies, but many are doing so voluntarily or in response to human rights complaints.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

If you are sensitive to scents:

- Examine product labels carefully, remembering that "unscented" does not mean a product is fragrance-free; simply that it has no detectable scent.
- Identify offending scents and look for simple ways to eliminate them (by changing cleaning products, for

instance).

- Talk to co-workers directly if you are sensitive to products they wear or use. Ask them to wear a lighter scent or go fragrance-free. Emphasize that you are making the request for medical reasons, not because you dislike a certain product.
- Talk to your employer about the introduction of a scent-free policy, emphasizing the many health and safety benefits. Mention some of the scented products routinely found at worksites including hand soap, air fresheners, deodorants, laundry products and cleaning products.
- Ensure your work area is well ventilated and that air is constantly replaced with fresh air. HEPA (high efficiency particulate air filters) remove particles from the air and will help reduce the number of allergens, as well as other problematic substances, such as dust, pollen, mold and tobacco smoke.

FINAL WORD

Be respectful when approached by coworkers with scent sensitivities or when asking others to go fragrance-free. Talk in general terms, rather than pointing fingers. Remember that everyone shares the same goal – to enjoy a safe and healthy workplace.