



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
Environmental Health Association of Québec

ECO-JOURNAL

May 2022

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Fragrance is not benign

To many people, the word "fragrance" means something that smells nice, such as perfume. We don't often stop to think that scents are chemicals. Fragrance chemicals are organic compounds that volatilize, or vaporize into the air, which is why we can smell them. They are added to products to give them a scent or to mask the odor of other ingredients. The volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) emitted by fragrance products can contribute to poor indoor air quality (IAQ) and are associated with a variety of adverse health effects (*Fragrance Chemicals*, 2013).

Over 4,000 chemicals are currently used to scent products, but none of them are listed on product labels. Fragrance formulations are considered trade secrets and therefore protected from disclosure – even to regulators or manufacturers. Instead, one word, "fragrance," or "perfume", or "parfum", appears on ingredients lists for countless cosmetic, personal hygiene, and cleaning products. A single scent may contain anywhere from 50 to 300 distinct chemicals (Zanolli, 2019). The total chemical-load of which, is unknown on the human body.

Of the thousands of chemicals used in fragrances, most have not been tested for toxicity, alone or in combination with one another (*The Dirty Dozen*, n.d.). In fact, the majority of toxicological research is done one chemical at a time, but the reality is we are exposed to combinations of chemicals at any given moment over the course of a lifetime which adds up to incredible chemical loads that heavily burden our bodies. Exposure to fragrance chemicals can cause headaches; eye, nose, and throat irritation; nausea; forgetfulness; loss of coordination; and other respiratory and/or neurotoxic symptoms (*Fragrance Chemicals*, 2013). Many fragrance ingredients are respiratory irritants and sensitizers, which can trigger asthma attacks and aggravate sinus conditions alongside chronic health conditions such as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity.

Furthermore, many synthetic chemicals in fragrances are petroleum-based and can be harmful because of that. Some of these chemicals, found in fragrances, include phthalates,





which are endocrine disruptors, and carcinogens such as benzophenone and styrene (*Fragrances – Children’s Environmental Health Network*, n.d.). All of which have been linked to hormonal health disruptions, reproductive issues, and cancer.

Thus, seeing the simple word “fragrance”, or “perfume”, or “parfum”, on a product label is misleading. Eluding, to a simple, safe, and consumable ingredient when in fact the fragrance/scents added into products is made up of hundreds of chemical compounds that vaporize into the air so we can smell them. The ingredient list of fragrances/perfume/parfum is often hidden from consumers, manufacturers, and producers since they are considered trade secrets. Making it impossible to filter toxic fragrances out of the market. The chemical compounds themselves that make up the fragrance in products vary from volatile organic chemicals (VOCs), petroleum-based chemicals such as phthalates, carcinogens such as benzophenone and styrene and other endocrine-disrupting just to name a few. So, the effects of fragrance on human health range from hormonal health disruptions, reproductive issues, cancer, respiratory problems, skin problems, neurological problems, cognitive problems, gastrointestinal problems, immune system problems, cardiovascular problems, musculoskeletal problems and more (Steinemann, 2016).

This is why it is so strongly recommended to avoid fragrance as much as possible in all areas of life. When making the transition to a healthier, safer, and non-toxic lifestyle, it is obvious to see why fragrances should be eliminated. Fragrances are considered one of the biggest perpetrators of chemical toxicity found in everyone’s day-to-day life. Eliminating fragrance out of your life is one of the easiest and fastest ways to create a healthier living space, lifestyle, and conditions for better health overall.

To learn more about fragrance and fragrance-free alternatives visit our [Eco-Living Guide](#).

To learn more about the importance of fragrance-free health-care checkout our project [‘The case for making health care fragrance-free’](#).

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