



Tents, Flame Retardants, and MCS

The medical condition and recognized disability we work for, Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, has been growing in prevalence and has reached 1.1 million diagnosed cases in 2020. This translates to at least one in 34 people; of this number, 72% are women, and close to 50% are over 55 years old. (Statistics Canada) Around 65% of people diagnosed find themselves living below the poverty line of \$20,000 or less. (Statistics Canada 2015–2016)

Over one million Canadians, aged 12 and older, have been diagnosed with MCS, which is caused by sensitization to chemical pollutants. The Canadian Human Rights Commission recognizes MCS as a disability with the legal right to accommodation, like any other disability, under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

MCS is triggered by exposures to fragrances and commonly used products, such as personal care, cleaning, and laundry products, and deodorizers," as well as chemicals emitted from building materials and furnishings.

Exposure to these chemicals results in symptoms that include brain fog, breathing difficulties, pain, fatigue, and cardiac, urinary, musculoskeletal, and gastrointestinal effects. People with MCS also have a higher incidence of comorbid chronic medical conditions compared to the general population.

At present, there is no cure for this condition. This population depends on fragrance-free, least-toxic, healthy products as a basis for the best management of the disability and for access to health, other essential services, employment, and the community.



Since the use of chemicals is ubiquitous, this disabled population expends a good amount of time and energy to find the least toxic products and ecological solutions for everyday living. This includes 'off-gassing' chemicals from items using different methods, which can be time-consuming and costly to remove chemicals that could include flame retardants.

Due to the difficulty of finding 'healthy housing', people with this condition can become homeless. This can happen when a person has just been struck by the condition and has no 'safe' or 'least-toxic' place to move to, or even over a period of time, since a high proportion of unemployment in this community can lead to poverty. At times like these, people have to depend on tents and their cars for shelter. This can happen at any time of the year.

Tents and camping gear are, therefore, a vital need for the MCS community that becomes homeless, or if people with this disability want to enjoy camping. Chemicals used in these tents, including flame retardants, become part of the indoor air in tents and present a great barrier to shelter during difficult times. As mentioned above, resources and time are spent trying to remove these chemicals using different methods. Or, people with MCS have to purchase expensive tents without flame retardants. These can take time to arrive when ordered online, and the cost is much higher. Resulting in an issue due to the urgency of the situation and the poverty experienced.

We do not know yet if flame retardants are in the family of chemicals that trigger sensitization and disability. We would like further research in this direction. In keeping with the Precautionary Principle, we strongly support the removal of these chemicals from tents.