



Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)

Fragrance-Free VS Scent-Free

Empowering Community and Removal of Barriers (ECRoB)

While the terms fragrance-free, scent-free, and unscented are often used interchangeably, they actually denote distinct concepts. Understanding the distinctions between these terms is crucial for promoting indoor air quality and accommodating individuals with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) or respiratory problems. Consumers, businesses, and workplaces should familiarize themselves with these nuances to ensure accessibility for all. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge that the interpretations of these terms may differ depending on their application to products or policies.

This subtle yet crucial distinction can pose challenges when individuals attempting to accommodate someone with MCS or a similar condition inadvertently confuse these terms. For example, despite their best intentions, an individual may inadvertently purchase an unscented product instead of a fragrance-free one. Consequently, the person with MCS may continue to experience symptoms.

Despite the aforementioned distinctions, it is important to note that in Canada and the United States, there is no standardized definition for the terms scent-free, fragrance-free, or unscented across manufacturers. As a result, companies may inadvertently use incorrect terminology, thereby exacerbating issues of inaccessibility.

Definitions:

Fragrance-free:

A fragrance-free product is one that does not contain any added chemicals to create a scent. It will only possess the natural odor of its constituent ingredients. For example, if a product contains coconut oil, it will exhibit the natural aroma of coconut. However, if a coconut fragrance is added to the product, it is likely that it contains synthetic chemicals that may be harmful to health. In essence, fragrance-free denotes the absence of any added scent. A fragrance-free policy stipulates that only products devoid of fragrances can be utilized.

Scent-free:

Scent-free products are also referred to as unscented or non-scented. They signify that they do not smell of anything. A better term for them would be de-scented. Although some products are both scent-free and fragrance-free, meaning they do not smell of anything and do not contain added fragrance ingredients, some scent-free products do contain masking agents. It is important to remember some products which claim to be 'scent free' may have only masked the scent by use of an additional chemical. These chemicals are known as 'masking agents'. Using products where the scents are masked will result in inaccessibility and a worsening of the



disability of MCS, since the chemicals present will trigger symptoms. Be sure to research the product carefully.

Unscented:

See scent-free.

Non-scented:

See scent-free.

Scent/Fragrance-Free Policy:

ASEQ-EHAQ encourages the adoption of this policy terminology to be all-encompassing, as some individuals react to essential oils. Scent/Fragrance-Free policies include the use of products that do not contain scents, fragrances, perfumes, colognes, essential oils, incense, or masking agents, have the lowest emissions and are the least toxic.

Despite the information provided in this tip-sheet, it is always advisable to consult specific policies. As a general guideline, it is recommended to purchase only fragrance-free products for both personal health and the well-being of others with MCS, other disabilities and health conditions including asthma and other respiratory conditions, autism, migraine, headaches and dermatitis. For more information on why one should avoid fragrances, please refer to our Why Fragrance-Free Facilities Poster below.

Ressources :

Why Fragrance-Free Facilities Poster (colour):

https://aseq-ehaq.ca/pdf/fragrance-free_Colour_EN.pdf

Why Fragrance-Free Facilities Poster (back and white):

https://aseq-ehaq.ca/pdf/fragrance-free_B-W-1-EN.pdf

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety – Scent-Free Policy for the Workplace:

https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/scent_free.html#:~:text=The%20use%20of%20scented%20products,cleaning%20will%20be%20scent%2Dfree.