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French article: <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/chroniques/2025-09-07/avez-vous-pense-a-votre-charge-odorante-aujourd-hui.php>

### **Have you thought about your scent load today?**

Written by Patrick Lagacé.

At first, I didn't believe it: with artificial intelligence, it's so easy to create hoaxes. I looked at the poster photographed by a reader in a passport office in Saint-Hyacinthe and thought to myself: It could be real.

The poster calls on customers to be, if I may say so, olfactorily neutral. Let's purify our common areas – Please avoid scented products in our Centers And under these words, pictograms of products marked with a diagonal bar, the universal sign of prohibition: hair products, perfume, aftershave, deodorants, hand cream, air fresheners... Poster photographed in a passport office So I checked with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. I was told that all Service Canada offices (passports, employment insurance, Canada Pension Plan, etc.) display this anti-perfume, anti-odor poster: Service Canada has implemented this initiative to ensure that the service delivery environment is healthy for all clients and visitors, as well as to raise awareness of environmental sensitivities. Environmental hypersensitivities can cause a range of health effects and symptoms in those affected. The use of scented products is an individual choice; however, the chemicals found in these products can easily be inhaled by others. Ensuring a healthy and safe environment for everyone who enters Service Canada's in-person service points is a shared responsibility. Therefore, Service Canada promotes a low-odor environment and encourages limited use of scented products in our offices through these posters... I reread it a second time, just to get over the initial shock. First thought: I had never thought about my odor load. Am I a bad person? Second thought: Not sure that if you ask people not to wear deodorant and body spray, you're really going to end up with a low-odor environment, quite the contrary... Third thought: you've reached the most advanced stage of human sensitivity when your government makes posters asking you not to wash your hair and not to put on aftershave before going to pick up your passport. I don't want to make fun of people who suffer from environmental hypersensitivity. It seems to be a very real medical condition. Very real, but... But it only affects a minority of the population, about 3% of Canadians. That's 270,000 people in Quebec. For that, to accommodate 3% of people, the federal government would rather you smell sweat than the artificial scent of deodorant. Again, I insist: I don't want to make fun of it. I'm sure it's unpleasant to live with environmental hypersensitivity and its symptoms. But I find the government's hypersensitivity that gives rise to such considerations a little absurd. It's the times we live in, mind you. Hypersensitivity is primarily cultural. There are words that can no longer be said: people are no longer disabled, they are now in a situation of disability, and they have also gone from being homeless to itinerant to people in a situation of homelessness... Warnings must be placed before old TV series to warn that the jokes have aged badly after two or three decades, as if the audience didn't know: you know, just in case 3% of the audience gets angry and pretends to represent millions of angry people... Before the movie, no risks are taken; the audience is warned that they will be watching a film

that contains scenes of violence, profanity, people smoking, and even flashing lights. People will say that I am insensitive to environmental hypersensitivity. Not at all. If a colleague told me that my perfume made her sick, I wouldn't wear it to the office anymore; I'm not that mean. If she told me that my deodorant bothered her, I would make an effort to find an unscented one. But if that weren't enough, if I still gave off an odor that was too aggressive for her, I would suggest she wear an N95 mask, which is known to filter out most particles in the air... So, for someone I work with, there's pretty much no problem. I'm open to discussion. But as a customer in government service offices? That morning, before going to Service Canada, should I think about managing my body odor? It's crazy. We're going to ask 97% of people to stop washing their hair, stop wearing perfume, stop wearing deodorant, stop applying aftershave lotion or moisturizer—in short, to be beggars, for... So as not to bother the 3% of us who may be—on a variable spectrum of discomfort—indisposed? But maybe I'm intolerant. That would probably be the opinion of the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC), which has a fairly clear-cut view on environmental hypersensitivities, imagine that... I quote the CHRC on environmental hypersensitivity: This physical reaction is a health problem. It is considered a disability. People with allergies or environmental hypersensitivity have the right to be protected from what makes them sick. A disability, yes. The CHRC asks the question itself on its website: What is a fragrance-free policy? The Commission's answer: A fragrance-free policy is comparable to other workplace policies, such as an anti-harassment policy. It applies to all staff and is intended to guide their conduct. Anyone who does not comply with the policy may be subject to disciplinary measures. Harassment, yes. Wearing perfume and harassing a colleague: the same level of seriousness for the Canadian Human Rights Commission. But all is not lost, I thought as I continued reading the CHRC website, because the right to a fragrance-free work environment would not be absolute... Well, at least, I thought to myself, there are limits to the hypersensitivity of modern Canada... But I was wrong! There is a spaghetti of intertwined limits! I quote: "In some cases, this right may conflict with another person's right based on another ground, such as religion." So your colleague's right to wear perfume for religious reasons could limit your right to a fragrance-free environment due to environmental hypersensitivity! I pity the judge who will have to decide in this potential clash of fragrance hypersensitivities: religion or disability? I read this week in La Presse that Quebec school service centers are having to spend more and more millions in legal fees, particularly because they are increasingly overwhelmed by threats of often frivolous lawsuits from parents who believe that their little treasure has been wronged by the teacher, the school, a classmate... How does this relate to my point? I'm actually talking about the same thing: the incredible hypersensitivity of our times to just about everything, in our nostrils, but above all, above all in our heads. I was going to tell you not to forget to reduce your "odor load" to zero if you need to renew your passport... But the serious problem of environmental hypersensitivity calls for strong measures, so I suggest that Canadians who set foot in a passport office be forced to do what swimmers must do before diving into a municipal pool... Take a shower.