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

Managing Indoor Air Quality and Implementing Effective Fragrance-Free Policies in Public and Workplace Environments

A Practical Guide for Municipalities, Educational Institutions, Healthcare Organizations, Employers, and Public-Facing Organizations

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How To Use This Guide

This guide was developed to help organizations improve indoor air quality and create healthier, more accessible indoor environments through effective fragrance-free policies and related practices.

The recommendations are informed by findings from the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project, which examined the relationship between indoor air quality, accessibility, and fragrance-free policies through indoor air quality assessments, product testing, and lived-experience research.

Who Is This Guide For?

This guide is intended for:

- Municipalities
- Educational institutions
- Healthcare organizations
- Employers and workplaces
- Libraries and community centres
- Public service organizations
- Accessibility professionals
- Human resources personnel
- Occupational health and safety professionals
- Facilities managers
- Policy makers
- Community organizations

The recommendations may also be useful for any organization seeking to improve indoor air quality, reduce barriers, and support accessibility and inclusion.

What Does This Guide Cover?

The guide provides practical recommendations on:

- Indoor air quality and accessibility
- Fragrance-free policy development
- Policy implementation and communication
- Product selection and procurement
- Source control strategies
- Accommodation and accessibility considerations
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Continuous improvement practices

While the guide focuses on fragrance-free policies, it recognizes that indoor air quality is influenced by multiple factors and that successful accessibility initiatives often require a combination of environmental, operational, and accommodation strategies.

How Should This Guide Be Used?

Organizations may use this guide in different ways depending on their needs and stage of implementation.

For organizations that are new to fragrance-free policies, the guide can serve as a roadmap for policy development and implementation.

For organizations with existing policies, the guide can be used to evaluate current practices and identify opportunities for improvement.

For accessibility professionals, facilities managers, human resources personnel, and decision-makers, the guide can support planning, training, procurement, accommodation, and policy review activities.

Organizations are encouraged to adapt the recommendations to their specific circumstances, building types, operational requirements, and accessibility goals.

A Continuous Improvement Approach

Creating accessible indoor environments is an ongoing process rather than a one-time activity.

Organizations may choose to begin with a few achievable actions, such as improving communication, reviewing product choices, or introducing fragrance-free expectations, and then expand their efforts over time.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to reduce avoidable exposures, remove barriers to participation, and create healthier environments where more people can work, learn, receive services, and participate fully in community life.

Key Message

Throughout this guide, one principle remains central:

Accessibility includes the air we share.

Managing Indoor Air Quality and Implementing Effective Fragrance-Free Policies in Public and Workplace Environments

Introduction

Indoor air quality plays an important role in health, accessibility, inclusion, and participation. Most people spend approximately 90% of their time indoors, where exposure to air pollutants can affect comfort, productivity, well-being, and access to services, education, employment, and community life.

Indoor air pollutants originate from many sources, including cleaning products, personal care products, building materials, furnishings, pesticides, combustion sources, and outdoor pollutants that enter buildings. Among these sources, fragranced products are a significant and often overlooked contributor to indoor air pollution. Many fragranced products release volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including substances known to cause irritation, trigger symptoms, and contribute to poor indoor air quality.

For some individuals, these exposures can create significant accessibility barriers. People living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), asthma, chronic respiratory conditions, allergies, migraine disorders, dermatitis, Long COVID, autism, and other health conditions may experience adverse health effects when exposed to fragranced products and other indoor air contaminants. These exposures can limit participation in workplaces, educational settings, healthcare facilities, public services, and community spaces.

Research conducted through the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project examined the relationship between fragrance-free policies, indoor air quality, and accessibility. The study found that buildings with fragrance-free policies had substantially lower concentrations of volatile organic compounds and several hazardous air pollutants compared to buildings without such policies. The research also identified important gaps in policy implementation, particularly in education, monitoring, and enforcement.

Creating healthier indoor environments requires more than improving ventilation alone. While ventilation can help dilute pollutants, the most effective strategy is source control, eliminating pollutant sources before they enter the indoor environment. Fragrance-free policies, combined with education, procurement practices, accessibility measures, and indoor air quality management, can help organizations reduce exposures and create more inclusive spaces.

This guidance document provides practical recommendations for employers, municipalities, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, public agencies, and community organizations seeking to improve indoor air quality and implement effective fragrance-free policies. The recommendations are informed by indoor air quality research, accessibility principles, occupational health practices, and the lived experiences of individuals affected by poor indoor air quality.

Healthy indoor air benefits everyone. Accessible air benefits everyone.

Why Indoor Air Quality Matters for Accessibility

Accessibility is often associated with physical features such as ramps, elevators, automatic doors, and accessible washrooms. While these features are important, accessibility also includes environmental conditions that enable people to enter, remain in, and participate safely in indoor spaces.

For many individuals, indoor air quality is an accessibility issue. Exposure to fragrances, cleaning products, pesticides, building materials, and other airborne chemicals can trigger adverse health effects that limit participation in work, education, healthcare, public services, and community life. As a result, poor indoor air quality can create barriers that are just as real as physical barriers.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a recognized disability in Canada. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has recognized multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) as a disability and has identified fragrance-free policies as one approach to accommodation. Under Canadian human rights law, organizations have a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to remove barriers and accommodate individuals with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship.

The importance of indoor air quality as an accessibility issue has also been recognized internationally. In its 2025 Concluding Observations on Canada, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifically identified Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and expressed concern regarding the discrimination and barriers to equality, accessibility, and participation experienced by people living with this disability.

These developments reinforce an important principle: accessibility is not limited to physical infrastructure. The environment itself, including the air people breathe, can either support participation or create barriers to inclusion.

Improving indoor air quality benefits a wide range of individuals. While fragrance-free policies are often discussed in relation to Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), they can also support people living with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), allergies, migraine disorders, dermatitis, Long COVID, autism, and other health conditions affected by environmental exposures.

Creating accessible indoor environments requires organizations to consider both physical and environmental barriers. Fragrance-free policies, source control measures, improved product selection, ventilation, accommodation practices, and ongoing education can all contribute to healthier, more inclusive spaces where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully and safely.

Accessibility includes the air we share.

Research Findings: What We Learned from the Accessible Air in the Built Environment Project

The Accessible Air in the Built Environment project was conducted by the Environmental Health Association of Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) with funding from Accessibility Standards Canada. The project examined how indoor air quality affects accessibility and whether fragrance-free policies contribute to healthier and more inclusive indoor environments.

The study used three complementary approaches:

- **Indoor Air Quality Assessments:** Air quality testing was conducted in office environments across multiple Canadian provinces, including buildings with and without fragrance-free policies.
- **Product Testing:** Commonly used cleaning, personal care, and maintenance products were evaluated to identify chemical emissions and potential sources of indoor air pollutants.
- **Focus Groups:** Individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and other conditions affected by indoor air quality shared their experiences, barriers, and recommendations.

Together, these approaches provided both quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding the relationship between indoor air quality, accessibility, and fragrance-free policies.

Key Findings

Fragrance-Free Policies Improve Indoor Air Quality

Buildings with fragrance-free policies had substantially lower concentrations of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) compared to buildings without such policies. On average, total VOC concentrations were approximately 70% lower in fragrance-free environments.

Several hazardous air pollutants, including compounds associated with irritation and adverse health effects, were also found at lower concentrations in fragrance-free spaces.

These findings demonstrate that fragrance-free policies can have a measurable and meaningful impact on indoor air quality.

Source Control is the Most Effective Strategy

The study found that reducing emissions at their source is more effective than relying on ventilation alone.

While ventilation was associated with lower concentrations of some indoor pollutants, it does not eliminate pollutant sources. Ventilation helps dilute pollutants after they are released, whereas source control prevents pollutants from entering the indoor environment in the first place.

Examples of source control include:

- Selecting fragrance-free products
- Choosing lowest-emission and least-toxic materials
- Reducing the use of unnecessary fragranced products

- Implementing procurement policies that prioritize healthier alternatives

The findings support source control as the primary strategy for improving indoor air quality and accessibility.

Product Labels Do Not Always Tell the Full Story

Product testing identified VOCs of concern in some products marketed as fragrance-free, natural, or eco-friendly.

In some cases, hazardous compounds were detected even when products were marketed as safer alternatives. These findings raise concerns about product transparency, inconsistent terminology, and the limitations of current labeling practices.

The study highlights the importance of informed product selection, improved ingredient disclosure, and greater awareness of potential greenwashing practices.

Policy Success Depends on Implementation

Having a fragrance-free policy is an important first step, but policies are most effective when they are actively implemented and supported.

Using criteria developed by the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), the study evaluated policy implementation across participating organizations. While many organizations had policies in place, significant gaps were identified in education, monitoring, and enforcement.

These findings were reinforced through focus group discussions, where participants frequently described policies that existed on paper but were not consistently communicated or applied.

Effective policies require:

- Clear communication
- Ongoing education and training
- Monitoring and compliance mechanisms
- Organizational accountability
- Regular evaluation and improvement

Indoor Air Quality is an Accessibility Issue

Participants consistently described indoor air quality as a barrier to participation in workplaces, educational settings, healthcare facilities, public services, and community activities.

Many reported experiencing respiratory, neurological, cognitive, gastrointestinal, and dermatological symptoms following chemical exposures. Participants also described impacts on employment, social participation, mental health, and overall quality of life.

The findings demonstrate that indoor air quality is not only a health issue—it is also an accessibility and inclusion issue.

The remainder of this guidance document provides practical recommendations to help organizations translate these findings into effective policies and healthier indoor environments.

Building an Effective Fragrance-Free Policy

Research findings from the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project demonstrated that fragrance-free policies can significantly improve indoor air quality and accessibility. However, policy effectiveness depends on more than simply having a policy in place. Successful policies require clear expectations, organizational commitment, education, implementation, monitoring, and continuous improvement.

The following best practices are intended to help organizations develop and maintain effective fragrance-free policies that support health, accessibility, and inclusion.

1. Establish a Strong Policy Foundation

A fragrance-free policy should begin with a clear and well-defined foundation.

Use Clear Definitions

Terms such as "fragrance-free," "unscented," and "fragranced" are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing.

For example, products marketed as "unscented" may still contain fragrance ingredients or masking agents used to conceal odours. Without clear definitions, individuals may unintentionally use products that conflict with the intent of the policy.

Organizations should clearly define:

- Fragrance-free products
- Unscented products
- Fragranced products
- Acceptable and prohibited products or practices

Providing clear definitions helps reduce confusion and improve compliance.

Ensure a Comprehensive Scope

Effective policies should apply consistently across all indoor environments and to all individuals using those spaces.

Policies should consider:

- Employees
- Contractors
- Volunteers
- Students
- Visitors
- Clients
- Event participants
- Vendors and service providers

Policies should also apply to:

- Offices

- Meeting rooms
- Classrooms
- Common areas
- Washrooms
- Public service areas
- Indoor events and gatherings

A comprehensive scope helps reduce gaps where exposures can occur.

Assign Accountability

Organizations should identify who is responsible for policy implementation, oversight, and review.

Depending on the organization, responsibility may rest with:

- Human Resources
- Occupational Health and Safety
- Accessibility Offices
- Facilities Management
- Senior Leadership

Assigning accountability helps ensure the policy remains active, visible, and effective over time.

2. Integrate the Policy into Daily Operations

The most successful policies become part of everyday organizational practice rather than standalone documents.

Incorporate the Policy into Existing Processes

Fragrance-free expectations should be integrated into:

- Employee onboarding
- Orientation programs
- Contracts and agreements
- Employee handbooks
- Accessibility policies
- Health and safety programs
- Event planning processes

This helps normalize expectations and increases awareness among all building occupants.

Communicate Expectations Clearly

Communication is one of the most important elements of policy success.

Organizations should communicate fragrance-free expectations through:

- Signage
- Websites
- Event registration materials
- Appointment confirmations

- Automated email reminders
- Telephone messages
- Internal communications

Providing advance notice helps individuals make informed choices before entering a space.

Provide Education and Training

Education should explain:

- Why the policy exists
- The relationship between indoor air quality and accessibility
- The health impacts of fragranced products
- Product selection and alternatives
- Common misconceptions about fragrance-free policies

Training can help improve understanding, increase compliance, and reduce stigma experienced by individuals affected by indoor air quality.

Address Product Selection

Policies should clearly identify products and practices that may contribute to unnecessary chemical exposures.

Organizations should encourage the use of:

- Fragrance-free products
- Lowest-emission products
- Least-toxic alternatives
- Eco-certified products where appropriate

Organizations should also be aware that products marketed as "natural," "green," or "eco-friendly" may still emit volatile organic compounds and should be evaluated carefully.

3. Focus on Exposure Prevention

Reducing exposures before they occur is the most effective strategy for improving indoor air quality.

Prioritize Source Control

Source control involves reducing or eliminating pollutant sources before they enter the indoor environment.

Examples include:

- Eliminating unnecessary fragranced products
- Selecting fragrance-free alternatives
- Choosing low-emission building materials
- Reviewing cleaning and maintenance products
- Improving procurement practices

Research findings indicate that source control is more effective than relying solely on ventilation to manage exposures.

Support Source Control with Engineering Measures

Engineering measures can further improve indoor air quality.

These may include:

- Proper ventilation
- Air filtration
- HVAC maintenance
- Adequate air exchange rates
- Localized exhaust systems where appropriate

While ventilation is important, it should complement—not replace—source control measures.

Consider Third-Hand Exposure

Organizations should be aware of third-hand exposure, which occurs when chemical residues remain on surfaces, clothing, furniture, carpets, and other materials after the original source has been removed.

These residues can continue to release chemicals into the indoor environment over time.

Reducing third-hand exposure may require:

- Cleaning or replacing contaminated materials
- Reviewing cleaning protocols
- Considering furnishings and surface materials
- Supporting fragrance-free practices among building occupants

Addressing all exposure pathways helps create healthier indoor environments.

4. Accessibility, Accommodation, and Inclusion

Fragrance-free policies are not solely indoor air quality initiatives. They are also important accessibility measures that can help reduce barriers and support participation for individuals affected by environmental exposures.

Organizations should recognize that people experience indoor environments differently. While many individuals may not notice exposures from fragranced products or other indoor pollutants, others may experience significant health effects that limit their ability to access services, education, employment, healthcare, and community activities.

Understand the Duty to Accommodate

Under Canadian human rights law, organizations have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to remove barriers and accommodate individuals with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship.

For individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and other conditions affected by indoor air quality, accommodation may involve addressing environmental barriers that interfere with participation.

Accommodation should be approached as a collaborative process that seeks practical solutions while respecting the dignity, privacy, and individual needs of the person requesting support.

Recognize Conditions Affected by Indoor Air Quality

Although fragrance-free policies are often discussed in relation to Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), they may also benefit individuals living with:

- Asthma
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Allergies
- Migraine disorders
- Dermatitis and other skin conditions
- Long COVID
- Autism
- Other chronic health conditions affected by environmental exposures

Improving indoor air quality can support broader accessibility and inclusion goals across organizations.

Create Accessible Accommodation Processes

Organizations should establish clear and accessible procedures for requesting accommodations related to indoor air quality.

Accommodation processes should:

- Be easy to access and understand
- Protect confidentiality
- Encourage early discussion of concerns
- Focus on problem-solving and collaboration
- Include timely responses and follow-up

Employees, students, clients, patients, and members of the public should know where to seek assistance if indoor environmental conditions create barriers to participation.

Consider Environmental Accommodations

Accommodation strategies will vary depending on the needs of the individual and the nature of the organization.

Potential accommodations may include:

- Access to private offices or enclosed spaces
- Reduced shared air between occupants
- Alternative meeting locations
- Relocation away from identified exposure sources
- Hybrid or remote work arrangements
- Virtual participation options
- Flexible scheduling

- Modified service delivery methods
- Alternative educational arrangements

In public-facing organizations, accommodations should be designed to support participation while maintaining access to programs and services.

Address Public-Facing Environments

Municipalities, educational institutions, healthcare organizations, libraries, police services, community centres, recreational facilities, and other public-facing organizations often face unique challenges because they serve large and diverse populations.

In these settings, organizations may not be able to control every exposure. However, they can take reasonable steps to reduce barriers through:

- Clear communication of fragrance-free expectations
- Advance notices for visitors and event participants
- Staff education and training
- Fragrance-free procurement practices
- Accommodation processes for individuals requiring support
- Flexible options for participation and service delivery

The goal is not perfection. The goal is to reduce avoidable exposures and improve accessibility for those affected.

Promote Inclusion and Respect

Individuals living with MCS and other environmentally linked conditions frequently report stigma, misunderstanding, and skepticism regarding their health concerns.

Education plays an important role in reducing stigma and fostering inclusive environments.

Organizations should encourage respectful communication and recognize that fragrance-free policies are intended to support accessibility, participation, and inclusion—not to restrict personal choice unnecessarily.

By viewing indoor air quality through an accessibility lens, organizations can help ensure that more people are able to work, learn, receive services, and participate fully in community life.

Accessibility includes the air we share.

5. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

Implementing a fragrance-free policy is only the first step. Long-term success depends on ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

Research conducted through the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project found that education, monitoring, and enforcement were among the weakest elements of many existing fragrance-free policies. Organizations frequently had policies in place, but lacked mechanisms to assess compliance, identify barriers, or evaluate effectiveness.

Regular monitoring helps organizations understand whether policies are achieving their intended goals and provides opportunities to identify and address challenges before they become significant barriers.

Establish Clear Reporting Mechanisms

Individuals should have accessible ways to report concerns related to indoor air quality, policy compliance, or accommodation needs.

Reporting mechanisms may include:

- Designated contact persons
- Accessibility offices
- Human resources representatives
- Occupational health and safety personnel
- Online reporting forms
- Anonymous reporting options where appropriate

Anonymous reporting mechanisms can encourage participation by individuals who may be reluctant to raise concerns due to fear of stigma, retaliation, or negative workplace consequences.

Monitor Policy Compliance

Organizations should periodically assess whether fragrance-free expectations are being communicated and followed.

Monitoring activities may include:

- Reviewing complaints and concerns
- Observing compliance in shared spaces
- Assessing signage and communication materials
- Evaluating onboarding and training processes
- Reviewing procurement practices
- Identifying recurring sources of exposure

The goal of monitoring should be education and improvement rather than punishment.

Evaluate Indoor Air Quality

Where feasible, organizations may wish to monitor key indoor air quality indicators to identify pollutant sources and assess environmental conditions.

Potential indicators include:

- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)
- Formaldehyde
- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Carbon monoxide (CO)
- Particulate matter (PM)
- Temperature
- Relative humidity

Environmental monitoring can help organizations identify trends, evaluate interventions, and prioritize improvements.

Gather Occupant Feedback

Indoor air quality should be evaluated using both environmental measurements and lived experiences.

Occupant feedback can provide important information regarding:

- Perceived air quality
- Accessibility barriers
- Accommodation effectiveness
- Health and comfort concerns
- Areas requiring improvement

Organizations may consider:

- Employee surveys
- Student surveys
- Accessibility surveys
- Focus groups
- Suggestion systems
- Accommodation reviews

Combining quantitative and qualitative information provides a more complete understanding of indoor environmental conditions.

Review Accommodation Processes

Organizations should periodically evaluate accommodation procedures to ensure they remain accessible, effective, and responsive.

Review questions may include:

- Are accommodation requests handled in a timely manner?
- Are individuals aware of available supports?
- Are accommodations achieving their intended outcomes?
- Are barriers being identified and addressed effectively?
- Are additional resources or training required?

Regular reviews help ensure accommodation processes remain meaningful and effective over time.

Update Policies as Needed

Organizations change over time, and fragrance-free policies should evolve accordingly.

Policy reviews may be triggered by:

- New scientific evidence
- Changes in legislation or accessibility standards

- Building renovations or relocations
- Emerging indoor air quality concerns
- Feedback from employees, students, clients, or visitors

Annual reviews can help organizations identify opportunities for improvement and ensure policies remain relevant and effective.

Create a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Effective fragrance-free policies are not static documents. They are part of an ongoing commitment to accessibility, inclusion, health, and environmental stewardship.

Organizations that monitor outcomes, listen to feedback, and adapt their practices are more likely to create environments where individuals can participate fully and safely.

Continuous improvement helps ensure that fragrance-free policies remain practical, effective, and responsive to the needs of building occupants.

6. Product Selection, Transparency, and Greenwashing

Product selection plays a critical role in indoor air quality. Many indoor pollutants originate from everyday products used in workplaces, educational institutions, healthcare settings, public buildings, and homes. Cleaning products, personal care products, air fresheners, disinfectants, laundry products, and maintenance products can all contribute to indoor chemical exposures.

Research conducted through the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project found that some products marketed as fragrance-free, natural, or eco-friendly still emitted volatile organic compounds (VOCs), including compounds associated with irritation and other adverse health effects. These findings highlight the importance of informed product selection and the limitations of relying solely on marketing claims.

Understanding Common Product Terms

Consumers and organizations are often confronted with product labels that use terms such as "fragrance-free," "unscented," "natural," "green," and "eco-friendly." However, these terms are not always clearly defined or consistently regulated.

Fragrance-Free

Generally, fragrance-free products are intended to contain no intentionally added fragrance ingredients. However, product formulations vary, and the term may not always guarantee the absence of all fragrance-related chemicals.

Unscented

Unscented products may still contain fragrance ingredients. In some cases, masking agents are added to neutralize or conceal odours from other ingredients. As a result, a product may have little or no detectable scent while still containing fragrance-related compounds.

Natural and Eco-Friendly

Terms such as "natural," "green," and "eco-friendly" are often used to suggest that products are safer or healthier. However, these terms do not necessarily indicate lower emissions, lower toxicity, or improved indoor air quality.

Natural ingredients can still emit VOCs, trigger symptoms, or contribute to indoor air pollution. Product performance should therefore be evaluated based on ingredients, emissions, certifications, and available evidence rather than marketing claims alone.

The Importance of Transparency

One of the challenges identified by participants in the study was the difficulty of identifying products that are truly suitable for individuals affected by indoor air quality.

Current regulations often allow fragrance formulations to be listed simply as "fragrance" or "parfum" without requiring disclosure of individual fragrance ingredients. As a result, consumers and organizations may have limited information about the substances present in products they purchase and use.

Limited transparency can make it difficult to:

- Identify potential exposure sources
- Compare products effectively
- Avoid known triggers
- Make informed purchasing decisions
- Support fragrance-free policies

Improved ingredient disclosure and greater transparency can help organizations and consumers make more informed choices.

Recognizing Greenwashing

Greenwashing occurs when marketing creates the impression that a product is healthier, safer, or more environmentally friendly than evidence may support.

Common examples include:

- Nature imagery
- References to plants, flowers, forests, or fresh air
- Terms such as "clean," "natural," or "eco-friendly"
- Claims that emphasize sustainability while providing limited information about emissions or ingredients

Organizations should evaluate products critically and seek objective information whenever possible.

Selecting Lower-Emission Products

When choosing products, organizations should prioritize:

- Fragrance-free products whenever possible
- Lowest-emission alternatives
- Least-toxic formulations

- Products with full ingredient disclosure
- Credible third-party certifications where appropriate
- Products that support accessibility goals

Procurement decisions can have a significant impact on indoor air quality because they influence exposures experienced by employees, students, visitors, patients, and building occupants every day.

Product Selection as a Source Control Strategy

The Accessible Air in the Built Environment project identified source control as the most effective strategy for improving indoor air quality.

Product selection is one of the simplest and most cost-effective forms of source control available to organizations. Choosing lowest-emission and fragrance-free products can reduce indoor pollutant levels before they enter the environment, helping create healthier and more accessible indoor spaces.

By combining thoughtful procurement practices with fragrance-free policies, education, and accessibility measures, organizations can significantly reduce avoidable chemical exposures and support participation for a broader range of individuals.

Informed product selection is not only an indoor air quality strategy—it is an accessibility strategy.

7. Quick Start Guide: Ten Steps to Creating Accessible Indoor Air

Creating healthier and more accessible indoor environments does not require organizations to implement every recommendation at once. Many improvements can be introduced gradually and integrated into existing accessibility, health and safety, and facilities management programs.

The following ten steps provide a practical roadmap for organizations seeking to improve indoor air quality and implement effective fragrance-free policies.

1. Adopt a Fragrance-Free Policy

Develop and communicate a clear fragrance-free policy that supports health, accessibility, and inclusion. Ensure the policy applies consistently across indoor environments and organizational activities.

2. Define Key Terms Clearly

Distinguish between fragrance-free, unscented, and fragranced products. Clear definitions reduce confusion and improve compliance.

3. Establish Organizational Accountability

Assign responsibility for policy implementation, monitoring, and review. Accountability may rest with Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety, Accessibility Offices, Facilities Management, or senior leadership.

4. Communicate Expectations Early and Often

Provide information through onboarding materials, websites, event registrations, appointment confirmations, signage, employee communications, and visitor notices.

5. Educate Staff, Occupants, and Visitors

Provide education regarding:

- Indoor air quality and accessibility
- Fragrance-related exposures
- Product selection
- Accommodation processes
- Fragrance-free policy expectations

Education is one of the most effective tools for improving compliance and reducing stigma.

6. Prioritize Source Control

Reduce pollutants before they enter the indoor environment by:

- Eliminating all fragranced products
- Selecting fragrance-free alternatives
- Choosing lowest-emission and least-toxic products
- Reviewing procurement practices

Source control remains the most effective strategy for improving indoor air quality.

7. Support Source Control with Ventilation and Filtration

Maintain HVAC systems, optimize ventilation, and use appropriate filtration systems to help reduce indoor pollutant concentrations.

Ventilation should complement—not replace—source control measures.

8. Establish Accommodation Procedures

Ensure individuals can easily request accommodations related to indoor air quality and environmental exposures.

Potential accommodations may include:

- Private offices
- Reduced shared air
- Flexible scheduling
- Hybrid or remote participation
- Alternative service delivery methods

9. Monitor Indoor Air Quality and Policy Effectiveness

Evaluate environmental conditions and gather feedback from building occupants.

Where feasible, monitor:

- VOCs

- Formaldehyde
- Carbon dioxide
- Carbon monoxide
- Particulate matter
- Temperature
- Humidity

Review complaints, accommodation requests, and policy compliance trends regularly.

10. Commit to Continuous Improvement

Review policies periodically and update them as new evidence, technologies, standards, and organizational needs emerge.

Accessibility and indoor air quality are ongoing commitments rather than one-time initiatives.

Conclusion

Healthy indoor air supports health, accessibility, inclusion, productivity, and participation.

Research conducted through the Accessible Air in the Built Environment project demonstrates that fragrance-free policies, source control measures, informed product selection, and effective implementation strategies can significantly improve indoor air quality and reduce barriers experienced by individuals affected by environmental exposures.

Creating accessible indoor environments requires organizations to consider both physical and environmental barriers. By integrating fragrance-free policies, accessibility principles, indoor air quality management, accommodation processes, and continuous improvement practices, organizations can create healthier spaces where more people can participate fully and safely.

The benefits extend beyond any single population. Improving indoor air quality supports employees, students, patients, visitors, clients, and community members alike.

Accessibility includes the air we share.

Resources and Additional Information

Accessible Air in the Built Environment Project

The Accessible Air in the Built Environment project was developed to examine the relationship between indoor air quality, accessibility, and fragrance-free policies. The project combined indoor air quality assessments, product testing, and lived-experience research to identify practical strategies for creating healthier and more accessible indoor environments.

Project resources include:

- Executive Summary
- Full Research Report
- Peer-Reviewed Publications
- Webinar Recordings
- Educational Resources
- Implementation Guidance

For additional project information, visit the webpage of the Accessible Air in the Built Environment research project.

Webinar Recording

The Air We Share: Why Indoor Air Quality and Scents Matter for Accessibility

This webinar explores:

- Indoor air quality and accessibility
- Biological sensitization and chemical exposures
- Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)
- Human rights and accessibility frameworks
- Research findings from the Accessible Air project
- Best practices for fragrance-free policy implementation

A recording of the webinar is available on the project website.

Healthy Product Selection Resources

Eco Living Guide

The Eco Living Guide provides practical information on:

- How to be truly fragrance-free
- How to choose healthier products
- Reducing chemical exposures in everyday life
- Creating healthier indoor environments

Additional Accessibility and Indoor Air Quality Resources

Organizations may wish to consult:

- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)- LINK
- Canadian Human Rights Commission -Scent Free Policies - LINK
- American Medical Association – Fragrance Regulation H-135.902 - LINK LINK (full report from the AMA's Council on Science and Public Health. The AMA's stance on fragrance is listed under the Resolution 501-A-24 and can be found in the pages 749–783)
- Canadian Standards Association Group, & Accessibility Standards Canada. (2023). CSA/ASC B651:23: Accessible design for the built environment. CSA Group. Accessible design for the built environment

Contact Information

Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ)

Environmental Health Association of Canada (EHAC-ASEC)

For information regarding:

- Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS)
- Indoor air quality
- Accessibility and accommodation
- Fragrance-free policies
- Educational presentations and training
- Research and collaboration opportunities

Please visit:

https://aseq-ehaq.ca

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- Research partners and collaborators
- Community organizations
- Accessibility advocates
- Building occupants and participating organizations

Their expertise, experiences, and contributions helped advance understanding of the relationship between indoor air quality, accessibility, and inclusion.

About the Organizations

Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) and the Environmental Health Association of Canada (EHAC-ASEC) work to promote equity, inclusion, accessibility, education, research, and advocacy for individuals living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

The organizations support efforts to reduce barriers and create healthier environments where all individuals can participate fully and safely.

Accessibility Includes the Air We Share