

Harwich Accessibility Rights Committee Scent Free Policy

Purpose

To attempt to establish Harwich Accessibility Rights Committee meetings free of airborne irritants.

Background

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity is a growing major health problem. Several population survey findings indicate that while MCS appears to afflict 4% to 6% of the population, 15% to 30% of the general population perceive themselves as "especially" or "unusually" sensitive to common everyday chemicals.

The most problematic substances are perfume, cologne, aftershaves, essential oils, fragranced gels/hairsprays, laundry detergent, and fabric softener. Other fragranced products such as deodorants, shampoos, hair-care products, and lotions can cause problems for some people. Certain fragrances linger for several days or longer. The chemicals used in personal care products are also a serious environmental issue, impacting our air, water and landfills. We can each help create a safer environment every day through regular use of unscented products. We are not suggesting that people stop using items that are medically necessary.

MCS Referral & Resources, Inc defines multiple chemical sensitivity as "a chronic condition marked by heightened sensitivity to multiple different chemicals and other irritants at or below previously tolerated levels of exposure. Sensitivity to odors is often accompanied by food and drug intolerances, photosensitivity to sunlight and other sensory abnormalities, such as hypersensitivity to touch, heat and/or cold, and loud noises and impaired balance, memory and concentration." Some people also report increased sensitivity to electrical appliances, computers and televisions. MCS may be caused by an acute exposure or repeated low-level exposures to various environmental chemicals or agents. While some reactions resemble symptoms commonly perceived as resulting from an allergy, it is important to understand that reactions to chemicals are serious and can include neurotoxic effects which can seriously impair functioning. Except for the MCS victims themselves, few people realize that reactions to

environmental triggers may become so debilitating that those affected must make drastic lifestyle changes in order to survive.

Reactions can include symptoms such as headache, fatigue, burning of the eyes, nose and throat, voice loss, respiratory or breathing difficulties, dizziness, nausea, gastrointestinal problems, musculoskeletal pain and weakness, sleep disorders, seizure disorders, memory loss, concentration problems and cognitive dysfunction, etc. As you can tell, these symptoms can affect many organ systems and can be mild, moderate or severe. Symptoms can be immediate or delayed, transitory or chronic. The frequency and severity of these symptoms are made worse by subsequent exposures at even very low doses to a wider range of chemicals and other irritants from a great variety of sources, e.g., air pollutants, food additives, fuels, building materials, scented products, cleaning agents, etc.

The best treatment for chemical sensitivity is avoidance of the offending substances.

Policy

The Harwich Accessibility Rights Committee will attempt to conduct its lawfully posted meetings free of scents and fragrances that cause problems for persons who are chemically sensitive.

Protocol

A The meeting notice will include the message “The Accessibility Rights Committee attempts to maintain a scent-free environment that is safe and comfortable for all. We request that you refrain from wearing perfume, cologne, and other scented products or chemicals.”

B The Chair will remind attendees at the beginning of each posted meeting that the meeting is scent free. Attendees will be advised to notify the Chair if they are affected by fragrances.

C If the Chair receives any notice from an affected person then the Chair will attempt to provide a reasonable accommodation by mitigating the scent. Mitigation can be as simple as opening a window or rearranging seating. If the scent cannot be mitigated then the Chair may table for a future meeting the discussion of any agenda item of interest to the affected person.

-Carla

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