



4.03 DRESS, APPEARANCE AND FRAGRANCE IN THE WORK PLACE

Dress & Appearance

A neat and professional appearance is a requirement of the City of Portland. General cleanliness and personal hygiene are important in all work environments. It is expected that all employees will exercise good judgment and dress appropriately for their jobs. Different styles will be necessary depending on the degree of customer contact, the nature of the work, work location, and safety issues. Clothing that displays offensive slogans is prohibited.

Bureau Responsibility

Bureau managers shall establish guidelines applicable for appropriate attire for their departments, as well as any exceptions, depending on the assignments and working environments.

Fragrance Free Workplace

Employees who are sensitive to perfumes and chemicals may suffer potentially serious health consequences, triggered by exposure to scented products. Consequently, employees are asked to refrain from the use of personal scented products in the workplace where the sole purpose is to produce a scent, such as perfume, after shave, and cologne and to avoid the use of strongly scented personal hygiene products such as laundry soap, dryer sheets hand lotion, powder, hair spray, and deodorant.

All City managers and supervisors are expected to enforce this rule. An employee who is experiencing health consequences due to another employee's use of scented products should report the problem to their supervisor to ensure appropriate action is taken.

Administrative Rule History

Adopted by Council March 6, 2002, Ordinance No. 176302
Effective April 5, 2002
Revised March 18, 2011, Ordinance No. 184432
Revised April 25, 2016

Guidance for HRAR 4.03
Fragrance Free Workplace Q & A – 2/10/11

Q. The HRAR asks employees to refrain from wearing scented products - -does this mean I can continue to wear perfume at work?

A. Although the restriction is not mandatory, it is very important that we do not impact the health of other employees by our personal choices. For those employees who are sensitive to fragrances it will help a great deal if we all voluntarily stop wearing our perfumes, aftershaves, and colognes at work. Save it for the weekend!

Q. What can I do to prevent harming people affected by scents?

A. Choose not to wear perfumes, aftershaves, or colognes in the workplace. In addition, you can opt for 'fragrance-free,' 'scent-free,' or 'unscented' versions of such personal care products as hand and body lotions, soaps, hair products, and deodorants. Scent-free personal care products can be found at your local supermarket and pharmacy.

Q. Is this a real problem? Perfumes and scents have been used by people since the dawn of time.

A. Yes! Employees who are sensitive to perfumes and chemicals suffer serious health consequences when exposed to such products. While there is much that is not understood about scented products, there is no doubt that these materials make some people unwell.

Q. I would resent being told, or feel uncomfortable telling others, what kind of personal products to use. Isn't the request to adopt scent-free practices intrusive on the individual's right to wear whatever they want?

A. One of the reasons the HRAR does not mandate that all employees stop using all scented products in the workplace is to balance what is seen as a personal and private matter with the need to safeguard individuals who are sensitive to such products. The goal is not to target people personally or to criticize people's preferences, but to raise awareness of the issue so employees stop using scented products, especially those where the sole purpose is to produce a scent. If your personal hygiene products do not have a strong scent you can probably continue to use them. However, when the scents from these products affect the health and well-being of a co-worker, it goes beyond just being a matter of private concern and must be addressed in the particular work place. At that point, it is no longer an "optional" choice.

Q. Why should I adopt scent-free practices when there isn't anyone in my unit who suffers from an allergy or sensitivity? The perfume I wear and the scented products I use aren't bothering anyone.

A. Do you know that for a fact? Perhaps someone is suffering in silence. Or maybe you will come in contact with someone with a chemical sensitivity during the day. By putting all the responsibility for coming forward on the person who is at the most risk of becoming ill, you increase their chances of having a reaction.

Q. If we ask people to avoid using scented products, perhaps they will stop using personal care products altogether. Poor hygiene and strong body odor might be the result. Surely we want to avoid this?

A. This is not the likely consequence of adopting scent-free practices. The HRAR asks that employees stop using strongly scented personal hygiene products; not stop using them altogether.

Q. What if I am having a reaction to a co-worker's perfume or other scented product - - should I say something to them?

A. It is not your responsibility to talk with co-workers. Plus if you are sensitive to fragrances, it is important to address the issue more broadly than a conversation with one co-worker. You should talk with your supervisor and/or with the Human Resources Business Partner assigned to your bureau. They will discuss the matter with you and work with you to determine what steps need to be taken to address your health concerns. Your supervisor is responsible for ensuring that your co-workers abide by whatever protections are put in place for you.

Q. What about confidentiality? Will my co-workers know that I am the one who complained?

A. Generally co-workers will not be given the name of the person who complained. However, it isn't always possible to conceal a complainant's identity and it may be important that your co-workers are aware of your sensitivity. The confidentiality of your personal medical information will be maintained.