



## Canadians for A Safe Learning Environment

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### **Achieving Healthy and Productive Meeting Spaces**

When organizing a meeting, it is important to provide the healthiest meeting space possible. It should be as free of environmental irritants (pollutants) as possible in order to achieve maximum productivity to reach your desired outcome.

An indoor air irritant can be defined as any substance that adds to the pollutant load, negatively affects indoor air quality, and is capable of putting a strain on the human body.

Examples include:

- 1) chemical off-gassing from personal care and laundry products, cleaning products, furnishings, building materials, renovations, office supplies and materials.
- 2) dust and dust mites.
- 3) mold.
- 4) pollen.
- 5) pesticides.
- 6) fire retardants.
- 7) office equipment.
- 8) carpeting.
- 9) gases ie: ozone, radon, propane, combustion gases.
- 10) people ie: CO<sub>2</sub>, viruses, bacteria.
- 11) others such as radon, lead, asbestos...

The outcome of your meeting can be improved by providing the healthiest meeting space possible. Prior planning and attention to details can be helpful in achieving this goal.

Generally there are three major questions to ask:

- (1) What is in this room that could be a source of irritation?
- (2) What will be brought into this room that could be a source of irritation?
- (3) What needs to be done to minimize the exposure?

### **The Participants**

Often the participants are the biggest source of chemical irritants in a meeting space. The chemicals from scented personal care and laundry products and clothing contaminated with tobacco smoke, mould spores or pet dander from home, and more, can provide layers of irritants that are released into the air of meeting spaces. (The higher the number of individuals the higher the irritant potential) This added to all other possible irritants from sources listed above can produce a chemical soup which can, according to current scientific research, alter our central nervous system and affect our concentration, memory, reasoning, mood, and health.

- 1\_\_\_\_\_ Have participants been asked to attend scent-free?
- 2\_\_\_\_\_ Have participants been educated on what scent-free means and on the harmful effects of scented products? Individuals need to know that perfume and aftershave are only two of the many scented personal care products.
- 3\_\_\_\_\_ Have they been provided with a list of fragrance-free, safer personal care and laundry products?\_\_\_\_\_ Are they able to purchase these products?
- 4\_\_\_\_\_ Have individuals who smoke been requested to attend smoke-free?
- 5\_\_\_\_\_ Have participants been notified to refrain from bringing toxic materials such as markers, vinyl covers, correction fluids, art and craft supplies (etc.) to the meeting?
- 6\_\_\_\_\_ What course of action will be taken if these requests are not met?

Generally just posting a fragrance free sign in your building does very little to encourage staff and participants to be scent free. We have found in the past that education, visual reminders and a thank you to all who use the building, in addition to posting signs, are more effective.

## The Building and The Meeting Room

What type of room will you use: office, classroom, library, lab, auditorium, cafeteria, staff room, basement, gymnasium or board room? The choice will depend on what is available and needed. Ideally the best choice for a meeting room would be a room with excellent ventilation, hard surface flooring, natural lighting, solid wood furnishings, well cleaned with safe fragrance-free products, safe visual aids, and only the materials and resources necessary for your meeting.

The two most important considerations regarding the room itself, are the **type of ventilation** and the **cleaning and maintenance products** used. According to the US Indoor Air Quality Cutter Corporation, poor ventilation is responsible for half of all indoor air quality problems. Working with the building maintenance staff and building manager prior to your meeting can ensure the safest environment possible.

### Questions to consider:

1. What type of ventilation system?

a) Natural: windows that open \_\_\_\_\_ outside air quality \_\_\_\_\_.

b) Mechanical: regular cleaning and maintenance of system and duct work and replacement of filters, all according to manufacturer's instructions? \_\_\_\_\_ Is the unit turned off on weekends or evenings? \_\_\_\_\_ Air intake/outtake vent in a good location? \_\_\_\_\_ What is the air quality being drawn in and how is it circulated? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What cleaning products will be used? Are they fragrance free? \_\_\_\_\_ Do they contain harmful chemicals ie: formaldehyde, chlorine? \_\_\_\_\_ Are MSDS (material safety data sheets) available? \_\_\_\_\_ Will the room be cleaned prior to meeting? \_\_\_\_\_ Any waxing or polishing? \_\_\_\_\_ The goal here is to use the safest, least toxic product available to do the job.

3. Room location in building: next to chemical storage, \_\_\_\_\_ furnace room, \_\_\_\_\_ garage, \_\_\_\_\_ washrooms, \_\_\_\_\_ cafeteria, \_\_\_\_\_ pool, \_\_\_\_\_ smoking lounge, \_\_\_\_\_ print room, \_\_\_\_\_ or gift shop selling scented products? \_\_\_\_\_

What areas do participants have to pass through to get to meeting room? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Prior use of meeting room: art, craft or science class, cooking, cosmetic demonstration. \_\_\_\_\_

5. Any evidence of pest or rodent infestation? \_\_\_\_\_ Any prior pesticide use? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Any evidence of water leaks, musty smell or mold growth on ceiling, carpet or windows? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Type and condition of furnishings, flooring especially carpets (hard surfaces are preferable), window coverings. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Any prior air quality complaints in the building or room? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Are heating source, temperature, and humidity controls acceptable? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Safe presentation materials, ie: white boards, non-toxic markers, dust free chalk? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Any odors from food or food preparation (peanut butter, shellfish) in the meeting room? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What is the noise factor of the room? \_\_\_\_\_ Is it next to the music room or gym? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Any building renovations current or just completed? ie: painting, floor refinishing, roof tarring, new construction. \_\_\_\_\_ Are isolation techniques being followed? \_\_\_\_\_ Work notices? \_\_\_\_\_

14. Any prior problems? ie: chemical spills, water damage, lead, asbestos. \_\_\_\_\_

15. What else will be happening in the building during your meeting time?

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16. The washrooms: do they contain deodorizers? \_\_\_\_\_ Is the hand soap fragrance free? \_\_\_\_\_ Are the washrooms clean and free of mold? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Do exhaust fumes enter the building from road traffic or vehicles/delivery vans idling their engines? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Is there a portable air filtration system? \_\_\_\_\_ Is filtered water available for drinking? \_\_\_\_\_

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