Addressing Scents in the Workplace

Smells in the workplace can be caused by:

• Perfume/cologne/spritzes
• Body odor
• Air fresheners/scent diffusers
• Flowers/plants
• Cleaning products
• Food

They can cause issues for others who may have:

• Sensitivity
• Allergy/irritation
• Medical conditions

Be aware of odors in your area to ensure a pleasant environment with others. Be observant of other’s reactions if you have use of these scents. They may be suffering from:

• Headaches
• Nausea
• Skin redness, itching and burning
• Watery, itchy, burning eyes
• Sneezing
• Runny nose
• Congestion

If you are unable to tolerate any of the above, talk to the individual with the scents, and/or your supervisor. Always approach the person in a cordial way and follow these helpful hints:

• Be respectful and listen.
• They may not even realize their favorite scents cause others issues.
• Make the conversation short and concise.
• Get to the point and tell them your concerns in a kind and polite way.
• Don’t judge the person.
• There can be reasons for the scents that you don’t know or understand and they are not comfortable in sharing.
• Speak to the person in private.
• There is no need to embarrass anyone.
• Don’t make the other person feel you are singling them out.
• Be cautious not to link the scent issue to gender/sex/ethnicity/culture.
• Set a plan for resolution and check back with one another. This can be the start of a lasting friendship.

If you are a supervisor with employees affected by scents in the work area, talk to the person with the scent, in private, to see if a compromise can be made to prevent issues for others and the department. Be sure to follow the guidelines on this tip sheet when approaching an employee.

If you or an employee have a medical condition that may cause a sensitivity to scents, or you are unable to reach a compromise in your area, the NIU Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator may be able to provide assistance. Please speak with the ADA Coordinator and provide the medical documentation for your condition:

ADA Coordinator
Affirmation Action and Equity Compliance
815-753-1118
ada@niu.edu
www.niu.edu/aaec/complaints/ada-accommodation-request