

Dress, Appearance and Fragrance in the Workplace for Human Resource Administrative Rule 4.03

Updated November 2024

This guidance and FAQ should be used in conjunction with the City's 4.03 Dress, Appearance and Fragrance in the Workplace Policy.

Collective bargaining agreements may also include language outlining specific requirements or allowances for safe or appropriate workplace clothing. Please refer to applicable agreements or bureau or program area work rules for specific conditions that may apply separate from HRAR 4.03 and this guidance.

The process for safety glasses and clothing were previously codified within Portland City Code and approved to be repealed by City Council in November 2024 to align with the revised Charter. This details the human resources, bureau, employee and financial procedures that are no longer in Code and redirected as appropriate under administrative rules and procedures. Please refer to the related Accounting policy for more details on Clothing and Equipment Allowances and Reimbursement Details.

Generally, if safety glasses are required to be worn by employees working in areas where continuous eye hazards exist, the following process is established to determine need and obtain safety glasses:

1. The Employee Relations Office in Human Resources investigate units where there may be continuous eye hazards. Employee Relations will report the findings and makes recommendations to the Budget and Finance Administrator. The Finance Administrator, subject to the approval of the City Administrator or designee, of the unit concerned may authorize a safety glasses program for a unit or for employees within a unit who may perform duty which is a continuous hazard to the eyes.
2. Safety glasses with safety frames and uncorrected lenses (planos) will be supplied by the City without cost to the employee. Employees who need corrective lenses will obtain the prescription for their lenses at their own expense from a doctor of their own choosing. In addition, employees will also bear the cost of the ground lenses and frames. However, if corrective lenses and frames are obtained through the City, the City will allow as a credit the amount which the City pays for planos with standard safety frames.

3. Payment for corrective lenses and frames will be made to the supplier by the City, which in turn will collect such cost from the employee, less the allowance for planos with standard frames. Such collections shall be turned over to the City Treasurer to be credited to the appropriate revenue account.
4. The expenditure of City funds for safety glasses will be limited to those units where a continuous eye hazard exists.
5. Corrective glasses will be property of the employee. Planos will be the property of the City. Replacement of broken glasses will be made on the same basis as the originals were obtained.
6. Once issued, safety glasses are expected to be worn at all times while in the hazardous work area as a condition of employment.

Fragrance - Frequently Asked Questions

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.