

Fragrance Trespass

Keep Your Scents to Yourself! A Children's Plea To Breathe!

by Julie Mellum



Julie Mellum founded Take Back the Air, a Minneapolis grassroots organization dedicated to cleaning up the top neighborhood air pollutants that invade other people's airspace without their permission, exacerbating asthma and causing a host of other health problems.

Take Back the Air's goals are to encourage others to join us in spreading awareness, to encourage neighbors and businesses to switch to non-toxic products that do not affect the airspace of others.

The mission of Take Back the Air is to inform the public about the hazards of wood smoke and fragrance chemicals and to provide information on healthier alternatives.

A recent Minnesota legislative proposal for a fragrance-free educational campaign in Minneapolis schools made waves across the nation and is applauded by students, teachers, and the media.

The intent is to discourage students and staff from wearing scented products that are a major source of toxic chemical inhalation which produce negative health effects, especially in children and those with asthma, lung disease, and heart disease.

Fragrance chemicals have been under the radar of even concerned environmentalists for decades even though legislation has been passed against industrial chemical trespass in many areas. More Americans are faced with air toxicants from secondhand fragrances that they are forced to breathe involuntarily from perfume, cologne, scented lotion, hairspray and gel, body wash, scented soap, scented laundry products, scented candles, and air fresheners.

Fragrance trespass is the involuntary deposition of toxic or potentially toxic fragrance chemicals within a human body. Most often this occurs when airspace is shared with those who use or wear fragrances.

Fragrances are now recognized as a major source of volatile organic compounds that contain many of the same cancer-causing toxicants that are in tobacco, wood smoke and vehicle exhaust, such as benzene, toluene and formaldehyde. Just as cigarette smoke penetrates the clothing of nonsmokers in a shared airspace leaving a stale smell, fragrances contaminate the clothing, hair, skin, and eyes of those who do not wear them.

Fragrances are comprised of volatile organic compounds that are derived from petroleum products and terpenes; few are "natural," even if deceptively labeled "organic" and/or "non toxic." Scented products are, in fact, one of the most prevalent indoor air pollutants in collective gatherings, such as schools.

Now that tobacco smoke has been banned in many states in bars and restaurants, it is paramount that awareness of fragrance trespass be mandated, if not regulated by law, in schools and other communal settings where airspace is shared.

Fragrances are replete with phthalates, hormone-disrupting chemicals that are implicated in reproductive defects that are becoming more common - especially in baby boys. Various states are attempting to ban phthalates, which are also in plastics,

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from children’s toys. But exposure to fragrances is far more pervasive than exposure to plastics. Fragrances are everywhere. Outdoor air is increasingly polluted from scented laundry products that spew into neighborhoods from dryer vents.

Knowing how fragranced products can cause harm to human health, it is time to take a serious look at limiting chemicals on our body that can also “trespass” into public airspace.

This Minnesota legislation has the ability to protect school children from unwanted fragrance trespass, therefore improving their health and

school attendance. The right to breathe clean air should come right alongside the right to free speech as a basic civil right. No other person should be able to take that away through ignorance or negligence.

Our lawmakers need our support and encouragement to ensure that no individual is forced to endure fragrance trespass, especially our children in school, which they are required to attend.

Fragrance trespass must be made illegal and clean air returned to school children.

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