

<b>Occupational Health &amp; Safety System</b>	
<b>OHS Standards</b>	<b>Number: ADM-07</b>
<b>Environmental Sensitivities</b>	

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this standard is to establish guidelines for the recognition, assessment and control of environmental factors that may lead to or exacerbate symptoms associated with environmental sensitivities along with procedures to be followed when dealing with suspected cases of environmental sensitivities.

## **What Are Environmental Sensitivities? (ES)**

People with environmental sensitivities may experience symptoms ranging from temporary mild discomfort to permanent, complex, long term disorders that might affect multiple body systems. The pattern and severity of the symptoms differentiates natural, temporary reactions to substances that are remedied easily through the removal of the exposure from systemic reactions which characterize environmental sensitivities. The degree to which symptoms are experienced is affected by the frequency and concentration of exposure. Symptoms are often manifested as a result of exposures to a particular substance at a concentration that does not produce symptoms within a broader population.

## **Environmental Agents/Toxins/ Irritants/ Sensitizers**

The following is a list of potential environmental agents/ toxins/ irritants/sensitizers that may contribute to an unhealthy indoor environment for an individual with ES:

- Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC's) including those found in scented products (i.e. perfumes, deodorants, etc)
- Bacteria, fungi, grass, pollen, plants, animals, moulds, dusts and dust mites
- Latex
- Building materials containing VOC's (i.e. carpets, new furniture, stained wood products)
- Paints, waxes and cleaning products
- Pesticides, bactericides, herbicides and fungicides
- Fuels (i.e. propane, natural gas, gasoline, oil, etc.)
- Electromagnetic Radiation
- Foods
- Other substances not normally thought of as noxious

## **Physical Signs and Symptoms**

Environmental Sensitivities can develop in individuals of any age regardless of whether they have a past history of allergies. The following is a list of some common physical signs and symptoms that have also been associated with environmental sensitivities:

- Central nervous system - fatigue, tension, headaches, confusion, memory loss, depression, hyperactivity, sleep disturbances, dizziness
- Gastrointestinal - bloating, nausea, constipation, cramps, diarrhea

- Genitourinary - frequency, incontinence
- Skin - eczema, flushing, rashes, hives
- Musculoskeletal - muscles spasms, joint pain, backaches, swollen limbs
- Respiratory - frequent colds, bronchitis, asthma, shortness of breath
- Cardiovascular - rapid heartbeat, irregular heartbeat, hypertension, migraines
- Ear, eye, nose, throat - nasal stuffiness, earaches, watery eyes, sinus infection, congestion

## **Reporting Procedure**

### **Students:**

Students who experience environmental sensitivities should:

- Students are asked to bring their concern to their program Chair (or Coordinator) first, to see if the issue can be addressed and resolved internally. If it cannot be resolved internally through a simple change, a request to the class or an adjustment, then student should contact CSD.
- Provide documentation from an appropriate licensed physician clearly stating the disability and its impact, while identifying the particular substances to which sensitivities have been linked. It should be recognized that the College is a large, complex and public community. The College, in many instances, has little ability to control otherwise safe exposures to a variety of substances, the source of which may be construction, building furnishings, valid chemical processes and use, residential activities, public, etc.
- The documentation provided will be reviewed by CSD in consultation with OHS to determine whether appropriate controls can be applied in order to mitigate the potential effects of exposures. Following such consultation CSD will determine whether there are any additional measures that may be adopted by the College to resolve the matter.

### **Staff:**

Staff who experience environmental sensitivities should:

- Report the circumstances of their condition to their manager.
- The manager will consult with OHS to further assess the potential exposure(s) and determine whether appropriate controls can be applied in order to mitigate the potential effects of such exposures.
- Following consultation with OHS, as necessary, the manager will consult Human Resources to determine whether there are any additional measures that may be adopted by the College to resolve the matter.
- Employees who suffer from environmental sensitivities will be required to seek medical attention from a licensed physician during this process to obtain a diagnosis of the disability and its impact, while identifying the particular substances to which sensitivities have been linked.