

# Eco-Journal

ASEQ

EHAQ



## Environmental Health Association of Quebec

The Mission of the Environmental Health Association of Québec (ASEQ-EHAQ) is the protection of the environment and human health directed towards the individual and the collective by creating awareness, support and education of the population on toxic products and pesticides. To promote ecological solutions and least toxic strategies to preserve our environment for future generations. *PAGE 12*

Issue No. 2, Spring 2011

### To all our Readers,

We are coming to you in the third month of the new year. How time flies!

This is an exciting year for us. There is much to be done.

We are working on our housing project with renewed passion due to the large number of desperate requests for healthy housing. These requests are from people who have become homeless after developing environmental sensitivities. Just this past week we had three urgent, desperate requests from people who are severely ill and are about to become homeless – I urge you to make a donation

towards our housing fund. All donations above \$20 will be given a charitable receipt which can be used as an income tax deduction. If you need more details, please contact us.

Our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting will be held on March 25<sup>th</sup> at Centre St. Pierre, Montreal. The theme of the presentations after the AGM is Healthy Housing.

May is Environmental Sensitivity month. We are planning events to create awareness about this disabling medical condition and the need for prevention. We have asked Quebec's Health Minister to acknowledge May 12 as *Environmental Sensitivities Day* in Quebec. On May 12 there will be a conference on environmental sensitivities and on May 28 we

will have a march in Montreal. We hope that you will participate in great numbers to show your support for people suffering from environmental sensitivities and the need for recognition, support and prevention.

Most of our members are too ill to participate in the walk. *Will you walk in their name?* To read more about this medical condition, please visit our website or contact us.

We have interesting articles in this newsletter. We hope you enjoy them.

Rohini Peris  
President

What are environmental sensitivities? The name does not describe the disability and suffering caused by this chronic medical condition. Chronic low dose exposures of pesticides and other chemicals found in commonly encountered products, solvents, mould or electro magnetic phenomena, or one large exposure, can trigger this medical condition. The resulting disability can manifest in a multitude of symptoms, often neurological, but also in all body systems. In order to recover, the patient needs to find a healthy place to live. Due to previous toxic injury, they cannot tolerate common public areas such as shopping centers, movie theaters, restaurants, libraries and even learning and working areas. This leads to exclusion and isolation; the patients' drop out of sight too sick to seek universal and common support or medical services.

This explains why even though there are over a million Canadians with a medical diagnosis of environmental sensitivities – many do not know about it. Environmental sensitivities can strike at any age and both sexes, though women make up a larger percentage of those affected (70% - 80%).

**No Sense to Scents:**

*The truth about fragrances and how they can be harmful to our health*

*Many of the the personal hygiene and cleaning products we use are putting us and others at risk. Learn the facts and check out some healthier substitutes.*

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# No Sense to Scents

*An estimated one in five Canadians are adversely affected by fragrance. For them exposure to perfumes causes symptoms such as asthma, coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, watery eyes and nose, migraines, confusion and aching joints.*

*by Rohini Peris*

Increasingly, people are becoming sensitized to chemicals at home, in the workplace and in public places. For some, exposure to chemicals in perfumes can result in serious health effects. Babies and children are most vulnerable, as are people who suffer from intolerance to chemical exposures (Environmental Sensitivities or

Chemical Sensitivities) and people recovering from cancer and other illnesses. As more information becomes available, people are requesting perfume/scent-free spaces in which to live, study and work. This can cause conflict with people who appear to tolerate these chemicals. It is well documented that healthy, clean air

promotes healthy lungs and healthy people. The two are strongly interconnected. Since we spend most of our time indoors, and we all need to breathe and share the air, it is important to have clean air free of tobacco smoke, mould and other chemicals including those used in fragrances and perfumes.

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## TIPS ON HOW TO BECOME SCENT FREE:

### Avoid:

**Fragrances and perfumes by themselves or contained in personal products and cosmetics, laundry and clothes softeners and all-purpose cleaners and disinfectants:**

- Chlorine bleach
- Fabric softener liquid or dryer sheets
- Dry-cleaned clothing
- New unwashed clothing
- Air fresheners (These do not eliminate the source of the odour. Tiny droplets from these products are easily inhaled deep into the lungs)
- Burning Incense (Cancer causing particles known as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are released when incense is burned. These cling to fibers and children can inhale and ingest them when playing on the floor).
- Scented candles (They tend to release more chemicals and soot than unscented candles. Candles with metallic wicks may contain lead.)

### **Chemicals like:**

Fragrance or Parfum, BHA or BHT, Colour, Flavor, Dibutyl Phthalate, Phthalates, Cocamide DEA, Oleamide DEA, Lauramide DEA, Formaldehyde releasing preservatives: DMDM hydantoin, diazolidinyl urea, imidazolidinyl urea, methenamine, quarternium-15, and sodium hydroxymethylglycinate, Parabens, Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS), Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES), Petrolatum, mineral oil, white oil, PEG or Polyethylene glycol or Propylene glycol, p-phenylenediamine, MEA (monoethanolamide), TEA (Triethalonamine), Phenoxyethanol, Triclosan, Imidazolidinyl urea, Aluminium, Carbopol, Silicone (Dimethicone), DEET, Siloxanes (cyclomethicone, cyclotetrasiloxane)

**Know** that some large companies advertise 'scent-free', 'perfume-free' labels for fabric softener sheets or liquids. This does not mean that they are not loaded with chemicals which will emanate for long periods of time. Also, such claims for detergents by these companies may not always be true as they are sometimes contaminated by fragrances.

### **Be aware of Green washing:**

Using words such as 'Organic', 'Clean', 'Green', 'Eco', 'Natural', etc, or packaging that gives the appearance of being 'green' – such as using plants, the colour green, etc., BUT either does not list the contents of the product, or if the product content is listed it contains chemicals that are known or suspected to cause adverse health effects.

### Use:

- **Druide** line of products have a hair gel and hair spray, shampoos, deodorants, personal and cleaning products. The **Pur and Pure** products are scent free and free of essential oils.
- **Nature Clean** – has a line of cleaning, laundry, clothes softener and personal care products and natural disinfectants. Read labels.
- **Green Beaver** – Personal products. Read labels.

**Safe makeup and hair products** are available in health stores – **ALWAYS READ LABELS.**

### **Shaving cream/lotion:**

- **Druide** – Cleansing Lotion, certified organic, can be used after shaving.
- **Alba Botanicals** – Moisturizing cream, unscented.
- **Kiss my Face** – Fragrance free moisture shave.
- **Clinique Shave gel** – Unscented, not all natural.

### **Laundry and cleaning products:**

- **Seventh Generation** – Laundry products.
- **Static Eliminator** cloths available in health stores eliminate static (2 cloths for 500 laundry loads).
- **Dryer balls** – To soften clothes in the dryer.
- **Vinegar** – Used on face cloth in dryer or 1/8<sup>th</sup> to 1/4<sup>th</sup> cup in laundry with soap or rinse water. Removes impurities and softens clothes.

**Instead of air fresheners: ventilate well, choose natural deodorizers that absorb odors, such as zeolite or baking soda.**

### **Use products that have ECOCERT certification:**

Please note that this certification does not include scent-free. It is always important to read labels.

<http://www.ecocertcanada.com>

## FROM THE HEART

### Is this a Learning Curve?

By Marlene Baer Higgins



As a youth, I was a bright, incredibly energetic and multi-talented individual. Armed with a decent boarding school education and a great deal of summer camp experience, I set out to prove I could do anything. I rode horses, skied, canoed and played basketball and entered a profession I loved: teaching. After a few years, I took a leave of absence to travel to Europe and North Africa with a girlfriend, on a five dollar a day budget, where we slept in Youth Hostels or in our Citroen automobile.

As I enjoy a challenge, upon my return to work, I was offered a new position, teaching mentally challenged children. The work piled on, and I lost 15 pounds, but the pilot-project was launched successfully. I returned to mainstream teaching but eventually was called upon to use my special ed experience teaching bright but, severely learning disabled children in an open-concept classroom.

We knocked down walls and installed carpets to make room for the 25 students and two teachers. Eight years later, exhausted, I was forced to take a leave of absence. Sadly, I never returned to teaching.

Then I began a cross-country trek, with my husband, for his work. In our spare time we began renovating houses, as a hobby. My husband did all the heavy construction work and I did the painting, stripping, and staining. I admit it; I loved to see the wood come alive under the turpentine and mineral oil and other strong chemicals. I had no idea I was initiating a downward spiral with respect to my health.

Then in the 70's, I was thrown from a spirited thoroughbred horse, bouncing my body off a boulder and my life changed dramatically. Pain became a constant for me. At the same time I was shaken by two personal traumas.

My husband and I continued to move around the country, still renovating homes, where I was exposed to more noxious fumes and more chemicals.

In Nova Scotia I actually applied urethane to a small house in winter with the windows closed.

I became very sick. I could not make intelligent conversation; in fact, I could not complete a sentence. I could not drive my car safely, sometimes mistaking the gas pedal for the brake. Something was happening to me that was beyond the understanding of the medical community. I could still hike, ski and sail, but I became intolerant to cigarette smoke and engine fumes.

We continued renovating houses. A chiropractor in Nova Scotia referred me to a Cancer/Candida clinic in Mexico. After a time we returned to the Laurentians and we were off to the clinic in Mexico. Those three weeks improved my health considerably. Feeling like a new person, I took a real-estate course, and we continued remodeling homes. After five years, it started all over again. I reached a point where I could no longer deal with the clients' perfumes and cigarette smoke, dried flowers, clothes softeners and wood smoke in the homes I was showing. I was frustrated, embarrassed and confused and once again became mentally incapacitated. I gave up the real estate business and began extensive dental work removing mercury from my mouth. Sadly, the antibiotics given to me at the time did extensive damage.

I took intravenous Vitamin C for six months at the suggestion of my doctor. It saved my life.

The final straw was when my neighbor's house burned to the ground. Every time I opened a window I was sickened by fumes. I became filled with uncontrollable rage: my healthy home was now contaminated and I found it hard to breathe or find clean air inside the house. Acupuncture helped me to get over the symptoms of the toxic exposures.

My loved ones, friends, therapists and doctors all repeated the same line "Learn to live with it." As if the smells were all in my head. Heal emotionally, they said, and all will be well. Further complicating the issues was the huge worry over money: it was running out, what with the heavy cost of dentists, alternative medical procedures, naturopaths, osteopaths, acupuncturists, chiropractors (hundreds of thousands of dollars). We had been living on one income for a long time and we had sold our last parcel of 'nest egg' real estate we always regarded as a pension fund. Where were we to live once the money ran out and we had to sell the house? A move to any other house or residence would only make me that much more sick.

Thoughts of suicide were a daily part of my life. But then I found two angels of mercy. One angel made my meals and encouraged me to "hang on, you can do this" and the other, an osteopath, is helping me on a slow, painful journey back to health.

I have been incredibly fortunate to have a friend who is also knowledgeable about Electronic Acupuncture according to Dr. Voll (EVA) equipment who has helped keep me alive.

Since I have been hit with this condition I have lost all my friends who did not understand my severe symptoms on exposure to their personal products, such as, perfumes, deodorants, creams, lipsticks, herbal and other shampoos, etc. This further added to the isolation which had been caused by my having to give up all the things I love to do, such as movies, shopping, restaurants, vacations, entertaining, cooking, visiting libraries, flea markets, camping, etc.

For better management of this medical condition I have to use only non-perfumed, non-scented and odor free products for personal and cleaning needs.

I have a small life, now, thanks to certain wonderful people (not close by) and my supportive husband and dog. Thanks to them, my life is changing for the better.

Much love to all of us – from me. And always remember, no matter how bad it gets, never give up!

# Wood Smoke

*Many people use their fireplaces and wood stoves year round . We may be sentimentally attached to wood burning, but is wood smoke benign?*

While burning wood fires may seem relaxing, keep in mind that it is the toxics that make it so: carbon monoxide causes blood vessels to constrict and creates a false sense of well-being. We may be sentimentally attached to wood burning and feel that it is "natural", but is wood smoke benign?

## What is contained in wood smoke?

- Wood smoke is rich in tiny toxic dagger shaped particles called PM 2.5 (particulate matter smaller than 2 1/2 microns) that can penetrate deep into the lungs
- Wood smoke is rich in some of the same carcinogens found in tobacco, but is chemically active in the body 40 times longer than cigarette smoke
- Other substances contained in wood smoke: carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, dioxins, furans, lead, benzene, cadmium, PAHs, arsenic, etc.

It does not matter whether your windows are closed or not, these substances creep into your home as they are microscopic in size. A single 24 hour fire in an open hearth fireplace will release, on average, between 1.6 and 3.1 lbs. of particular matter pollution per day.

When I am exposed to wood smoke, people can get migraines, asthma, and chest pains whether indoors or outdoors. Other people experience symptoms such as irritation of the lungs, throat, sinus and eyes. The most vulnerable people to wood smoke are those with breathing problems, the elderly, infants, people with compromised immune systems, etc.

With about 50,000 wood burning stoves and fireplaces in Montréal and another 35,000 on the rest of the island, it has been found that residential wood burning contributes substantially to air pollution in Montréal. Smog has become a major public health problem for

Montréal, according to Alan DeSousa, the city's executive committee member in charge of sustainable development.

## Legislation:

On April 27, 2009 the city of Montréal enacted a bylaw preventing the construction of wood stoves and fireplaces in new homes. However, EPA certified pellet stoves are still allowed. This legislation is now being contested by the Association des professionnels du chauffage as well as by two Montréal residents. A court date has been set in 2011 and until that date the bylaw is in effect. Other municipalities in Canada have enacted different types of bylaws concerning wood smoke: Hampstead (QC), Golden (BC), Merritt (BC), etc. The State of Washington has laws to address neighbors' wood smoke and is considered a nuisance subject to enforcement action.

## Alternatives:

One can wonder whether residential wood burning is necessary in a province so rich in hydroelectricity. Gas fireplaces produce fewer emissions than wood fireplaces and wood stoves. According to the US EPA, gas furnaces produce fewer emissions than pellet stoves, EPA certified wood stoves, uncertified wood stoves and fireplaces. The highest emissions are produced by traditional fireplaces. A conventional woodstove emits as much fine particle pollution in nine hours as a car traveling 18,000 km

## Contacting your representatives:

If you would like to contact your representatives, you can ask them what are their plans to improve air quality in terms of the pollution caused by residential wood smoke?

-Nathalie Doiron

## For more information:

[www.pq.lung.ca](http://www.pq.lung.ca) (Québec Lung Association)

[www.burningissues.org](http://www.burningissues.org)

[www.canadiancleanairalliance.ca](http://www.canadiancleanairalliance.ca)

# PREVENTING AND ELIMINATING LICE THE SAFE WAY



*Lice can be pesky to deal with, but taking a few simple precautions may save you the hassle. Lice can transfer from coats that are stored in close proximity. If possible, ask your child or their school or daycare to store coats and other clothing in cubbies or on assigned hooks. If your child has long hair, tying it back in a braid or ponytail is advisable.*

*If your child contracts lice, do not panic! There are safe and effective ways to remove lice and nits and prevent their return. However, using lice removal products with pesticides is not the way to go about it. They are harmful to your child's and your own health, are carcinogenic and may cause damage to the central nervous system and affect hormones.*

Chemicals found in pesticide lice removal products:

**Lindane:** may cause cancer in humans according to the EPA, when absorbed in the skin causes central nervous system "excitation".

**Permethrin:** may cause cancer in humans according to the EPA, suspected of causing hormonal disruption.

**Pyrethrin:** contains a compound called piperonyl butoxide which may cause cancer in humans according to the EPA.

**Malathion:** Acts via the central nervous system, reported to affect immune system response after one single dose.

Proper pesticide-free procedure to remove lice:

- 1) Make sure the room is well lit.
- 2) Cover your child's shoulders with a towel.
- 3) Apply oil (edible) to your child's hair.
- 4) Brush your child's hair and divide it into ½ to ¾-inch sections.
- 5) Starting from the scalp, comb each section of hair using a fine-toothed metal lice comb.
- 6) Each time you comb out lice or nits, dunk the comb into a bowl of hot soapy water. Wipe the comb with a tissue to remove any debris and discard the tissue in another bowl of soapy water.
- 7) Shampoo twice to remove the oil.
- 8) Let hair dry and check for any stray nits.
- 9) Cut out nits with small scissors.
- 10) Flush both bowls of soapy water down the toilet.

11) Soak the scissors and combs in boiling soapy water for 15 minutes.

12) Wash towel in hot water and dry on high heat.

Removing lice from your home:

- 1) Wash all clothing and bedding in hot water and tumble-dry for on high heat for 30 minutes
- 2) Wash and soak all hair accessories and brushes and combs in hot (130 degrees Fahrenheit) soapy water for at least 15 minutes.
- 3) Vacuum floors and furniture. Seal vacuum bag after use and dispose promptly.
- 4) Items that cannot be vacuumed or laundered should be sealed in plastic bags for 11 days to ensure that the nits have died.
- 5) NEVER use commercial pesticides in your home.

Preventing Reinfestation:

- 1) Check your family regularly for at least one week following the outbreak to ensure that all nits are gone.
- 2) Advise your child's school or daycare to ensure coats and hats are stored separately on hooks or in cubbies.
- 3) Tell your children not to share clothing, brushes, or combs with other children.
- 4) If your child has long hair, tie it back.
- 5) Make sure your child's school does not use commercial pesticides.

The information above was derived from Shamra Harrison's article, *Getting Ahead of Lice*, which is available on the Washington Toxics Coalition website:

<http://watoxics.org/files/lice.pdf/view>

## Don't Let the Bedbugs Bite

Nadia spotted a beautiful mattress abandoned by the roadside near her home. It looked clean and relatively new, so she took it to her apartment. She lugged it up the steps, into her Plateau Montreal home, dragging it towards her bedroom. Then she happened to glance down and notice marker writing, scrawled on the back-side of the mattress: BEDBUGS!

With bedbugs on the rise in many major cities, the bedbug has become the new bogey monster, haunting the media, and appearing in unexpected places like the cinema, the airport, and even the workplace. Is the scare really justified? Bringing the subject up to my grandfather, who had dealt with bedbugs prior to DDT, he chuckled and agreed they were a pest; it took 3 months cleaning to be free of the nuisance. Yet many recent cases, employing modern pesticides have shown less results.

"The exterminator has sprayed three times already, and we're still getting bitten. It's been five months now. I'm really sick of this!", said Dominic, a Montreal tenant, echoing the complaint of many apartment dwellers. When it comes to de-bugging, it is important to be well informed, and to engage a knowledgeable company, one that does at least two visits, and will take measures to prevent re-infestation from neighbouring living spaces.

While bedbugs do present cause for concern, we should be able to travel, go to the movies, stay at hotels, hostels, and friends' homes without constantly worrying about catching the bug. It is possible to decrease the risk by taking some precautions.

- Make sure not to pick up any infested materials, such as furniture or electronics. Inspect items carefully before bringing them into your home. It is not advisable to pick up used mattresses.
- Keep in mind that bedbugs can be found in many places of transience, such as hotels, hospitals, residences, airports, and movie theatres.
- Keep luggage away from walls and furniture when staying somewhere that may be infested. Luggage may also be protected by placing in a garbage bag, tied shut.
- When returning from travels, do not bring backpacks and suitcases directly into the house. Bag items before taking them in. Any materials that can be machine washed or dried, wash them hot, and/or place them in the drier. Depending on the material, some bags and suitcases can be cleaned with a steam cleaner.

Infestations can begin with a single bug, so it is important to be thorough when dealing with this problem. Detection dogs, dogs trained to sniff out the offending critters, are able to pick up on bedbugs when even experts have trouble detecting low levels of infestation. If you think you have bedbugs at home, there is no need

to use conventional pesticides. From our experience, many pesticides can aggravate a problem by causing the bedbugs to disperse, spreading throughout a building. A steam cleaner can be an invaluable tool in the fight against bedbugs, as it can be used to treat the mattress, bedframe, and other materials in the room. Bedbugs are very sensitive to heat and at just 46°C will die in less than 10 minutes! From our experience, steam treatment and heat treatments are the best approach, as they target even the eggs of the bedbugs, which most pesticides cannot do. Unavoidably, a bedbug infestation means time for some serious cleanup. Clutter will need to be removed and often much clothing and bedding needs to be washed hot, and dried to get rid of the bugs.

### Tips for dealing with an infestation:

- Treat cracks and crevasses in room with *diatomaceous earth*. This can be found at the hardware store under the names Insectigone, or Insect Stop.
- Use a steam cleaner on your bedframe, especially to clean joints and screw-holes. Your mattress and furniture, if appropriate, may be cleaned with the steam cleaner. Note that dry steamers are often recommended.
- Use a zippered mattress cover for your mattress and box-spring
- Apply petroleum jelly around legs of bed. Place bowls, or trays under each leg of bed and fill with diatomaceous earth. See our site for more information: [www.ecobugdoctor.com](http://www.ecobugdoctor.com)

When Nadia realized she had brought bedbugs to her apartment, she immediately threw out the infested mattress, washed her clothes and took a shower before cleaning the hallway she had dragged the mattress through. Luckily she saved herself from an infestation, and a visit with our bedbug detection dogs confirmed that no bedbugs were present.

While bedbugs are a major problem, they can be overcome without using conventional pesticides, through thorough cleaning and use of ecological products. Though there is much debate as to the best ways of dealing with bedbugs, one thing bedbug experts can agree on is that it is much easier to prevent an infestation than it is to get rid of the critters once they are established.

Laurel Maloney



**Eco Bug Doctor Inc.**  
(514) 422-8457

**Pest control and  
detection services**



Vegetarian Borscht

- 1 large beet, grated
  - 1 small onion, sliced
  - 1 medium potato, cut into 1" cubes
  - 1 carrot, grated
  - 1 celery stalk, cut in half lengthwise, then sliced thin
  - 3 cups homemade vegetable broth (see following recipe)
  - 1 cup canned tomatoes, diced (reserve juice)
  - 1 cup water
  - 1 tsp fresh Dill (optional)
  - 1/8 tsp Black Pepper, ground
  - Salt to taste
  - ½ tbsp Apple Cider Vinegar
1. Place all ingredients, except vinegar, in a large pot.
  2. Add the reserved tomato juice until the vegetables are well immersed. Add more stock or water if needed.
  3. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 30 – 40 minutes.
  4. Cool slightly. Transfer to a food processor. Pulse a few times to blend a little or puree, if you prefer. Adjust seasoning. Reheat before serving.



Homemade Vegetable Broth

- 2 tbsp olive oil
  - 3 onions, roughly chopped
  - 3 potatoes, roughly chopped
  - 3 or 4 carrots, roughly chopped
  - 3 stalks of celery, roughly chopped
  - 1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed
  - 1 laurel leaf
  - A few springs of parsley
  - 7 ½ cups of water
  - Salt and pepper to taste
1. Heat oil in a large pot. Add onions and cook gently for 4 to 5 minutes. Add potatoes, carrots and celery. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic and herbs.
  2. Pour water into the pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for 40 minutes. Strain and use as needed.

Olga Laniak



Broiled Tamari Chicken

- 2 chicken breasts, deboned
  - 2 tbsp tamari sauce
  - 2 tbsp lemon juice
  - 2 tbsp vegetable oil
1. Cut chicken into 1 ½ inch pieces. Set aside
  2. In a bowl, combine tamari sauce, lemon juice and oil. Add chicken, stirring to coat well. Let marinate for at least one hour.
  3. Place chicken pieces on a broiling pan rack. Broil chicken on top shelf of oven for 7 – 10 minutes or until tender and no longer pink inside.

Olga Laniak

We Want to Hear From You!

Have any healthful recipes you would like to share with us?

Send them to [office@aseq-ehaq.ca](mailto:office@aseq-ehaq.ca)

Fax number : 514.683.2468

## 5 Tips for Safely Reusing Grocery Bags

*Using recyclable grocery bags is a great way to preserve the environment. However, if they are not cleaned properly and regularly, they can spread harmful bacteria and contaminate your food.*

- Keep reusable bags for food separate from ones used for books or clothes etc.
- To prevent cross-contamination keep dedicated bags for meats, produce, and prepackaged foods and clean them after each trip to the grocery store.
- Cotton, hemp, canvas, and poly-canvas bags are the best choice because they can be machine washed in hot water and will not disintegrate with heat.
- Non-woven polypropylene, recycled PET, nylon and nylon blends have to be hand washed in the sink with warm antibacterial soapy water. Laminated bags should be wiped down with a wet cloth and disinfectant.
- Always dry bags thoroughly turned inside and out before using.

# Holiday Party

On December 4, 2010, the ASEQ/EHAQ celebrated the holiday season at Mountainside United Church. Members had an opportunity to meet one another, partake in a fun afternoon of games where holiday gift prizes were given out, and enjoy a delicious lunch.



## What are perfumes?

Perfumes are considered to be the most concentrated form of fragrance. They have been used by people for hundreds of years to make us more attractive. In the past when bathing was uncommon, dabs of perfume were used to mask unpleasant odours. Fragrances used to be extracted from plants, flowers and animals. Today, 80 to 95 per cent of fragrance materials are synthetic and are derived from petroleum. These include thousands of different chemicals and many times more combinations. When mixed together, these combinations are potent and persistent. By their very nature, fragrance chemicals volatilize into the air and remain for a long time. This poses an increased problem for human health, especially when ventilation is poor.

Some of the chemicals found in fragrances are: aldehydes, benzyl acetate, toluene, ethanol, acetone, benzene derivatives, formaldehyde, limonene, methylene chloride, methyl ethyl ketone, benzyl chloride and many others known to cause cancer, birth defects, infertility, nervous system damage, allergy symptoms, headaches, difficulty breathing, eye, nose and throat irritation and other injuries.

## Where do you find scented products?

Fragrances can be found in personal products (soaps, shampoos, deodorants, hairsprays and gels, cosmetics, creams, make-up, etc.), cleaning products, laundry products, disinfectants, sunscreen lotions, incense, air fresheners, magazine inserts, paper, tissue paper, baby items and products, garbage bags, food, etc. In other words, they are everywhere. Today, there are over 1000 products on the market that include colognes, perfumes and eau de toilette. Even products labeled 'unscented' are often falsely labeled and actually contain fragrance products.

## How do perfumes affect us?

Fragrances are absorbed into the body through various routes such as: skin, mouth and nose (both by breathing and through the olfactory pathway, leading directly to the brain and nervous system). Fragrances in products used on the skin and those that are inhaled enter the blood stream and are distributed to other organs. Since many of the

same synthetic petrochemicals are also used as flavourings (raspberry, strawberry, lime, etc), they are also ingested.

Due to increased use and repeated exposures, problems have started to surface both for users and for others around them due to the volatile nature of fragrances. For instance, people suffering from Environmental Sensitivities / Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (ES/MCS) around the world have long been reporting adverse health effects due to their inability to detoxify and excrete commonly encountered chemicals. The resulting build-up of synthetic chemicals in the body and their residual effects leads to an inability to tolerate even low levels of exposure. The degree of reaction to the offending agent depends on the severity of the person's sensitivity and can range from a mild irritation to respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath and wheezing; neurological symptoms such as dizziness, headaches, migraines, nausea, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, depression, confusion, muscle weakness and pain; and systemic effects, such as loss of appetite and flu-like symptoms. Every system of the body can be affected with multiple symptoms. Exposures can leave the sufferer disabled and unable to function at work or in public places, and often forced into exclusion. In Canada, approximately 3% of the population has received a diagnosis of Environmental Sensitivity / Multiple Chemical Sensitivity from a medical doctor. For more information, visit: [http://www.aseq-ehaq.ca/ma\\_es/es\\_def.php](http://www.aseq-ehaq.ca/ma_es/es_def.php)

Skin allergies and respiratory distress due to fragrances are well recognized, as they are known to cause or worsen asthma, emphysema, bronchitis and allergies. According to research, many chemicals found in scented products can cause and worsen Sick Building Syndrome.

The brain is also impacted by fragrances containing neurotoxic compounds. Some effects are immediate and brief while others are long-term. These can include mood alterations as well as concentration and memory problems. Laboratory research shows that fragrance ingredients may affect receptors in the brain in ways similar to

alcohol and tobacco. Testing of a perfume product by the Environmental Health Network revealed that the product contained over 800 compounds. Of concern was a phthalate known as diethyl phthalate (DEP), a plasticizer, which made up just over 10% of the perfume. DEP is an irritant and a suspected hormone disrupter that accumulates in fat tissue. Phthalates such as DEP are among the most common fragrance ingredients found in perfumes and cosmetics. They are also used to soften vinyl plastic and are used in perfumes and cosmetics for many reasons: they help penetrate and soften the skin, lubricate other substances in the formula and help the fragrances last longer.

Phthalates are suspected carcinogens and hormone disruptors increasingly linked to reproductive disorders. An association has been made with early puberty in girls and disturbing trends in reproductive health in human males. Tests reveal that women of childbearing age have the highest levels of phthalates in their bodies. It is of great concern that the most fragile among us – the foetus – is being exposed to these chemicals at this most vulnerable time in human development.

It has been argued that the levels of phthalates in these products are not high enough to cause harm. Since these chemicals are also used in soft vinyl toys, food packaging, plastics, plumbing, wiring, carpentry and many more items, exposure to phthalates can occur many times every day.

## How can we be protected?

Many people get offended when asked not to wear perfume in order to protect family members, co-workers or others from adverse health effects at home, in the work place, in places of worship or in social situations. This often stems from an assumption that since the product is on the shelf, it has passed rigorous testing and inspection and is safe for use. This is not true.

The fragrance industry is not obliged to carry out testing or provide safety assurances. This is why there is no toxicity testing for over 80 percent of the approximately 4000 chemicals used by the industry.

Moreover, for the few that have been tested, there are large information gaps. For example, a chemical might have been tested as a carcinogen but not for bioaccumulation or other health effects such as neurotoxicity, hormone disruption, or adverse effects on children and the foetus.

In addition, there is no information on the effects of mixtures acting together, nor on the effects of new chemicals formed when different synthetic and natural chemicals are mixed. This information is lacking both on health effects and whether toxicity is additive or multiplicative. It is also not known what new compounds are formed once fragrance chemicals interact with the many proteins, hormones, etc., inside the human body.

Some chemicals contained in fragrances are also found in the environment – in outdoor air, waterways and aquatic wildlife. Fragrances from perfumed personal care and laundry products can be found in surface and drinking water. These chemicals break down on contact with sunlight and mix with other pollutants to form more noxious, irritating, allergenic compounds. Certain persistent chemicals such as synthetic musks can

bioaccumulate in the fatty tissue of aquatic wildlife and are found in fish in the Great Lakes. These musk chemicals affect the endocrine (hormonal) systems of many species; coincidentally, serious endocrine disrupting effects such as the feminization of male fish and amphibians, and masculinization of females, have been noted in aquatic wild life.

#### Scent-free areas

With an increasing number of people requiring scent-free spaces in which to live, work, play, worship, study and enjoy community life, it is important that employers, teachers and providers of community services are aware of this growing need. In addition, they should know how to approach the subject with others in order to successfully obtain scent-free spaces. The change to a healthier lifestyle is the easiest within the family as it depends directly on which products are purchased.

For work and school spaces and community centers, it is important to first establish a

scent-free policy and then proceed to implement it. This can be achieved by posting the policy for all to see, by distributing information on scent-free products that are readily available in the area and by requesting that staff, students and visitors be scent-free. Visitors should be notified not to wear perfumes or colognes prior to arrival and 'Scent-free' signage should be posted in key areas around the building.

It is also important to make sure that only unscented products are used for cleaning within the building and that all products available to the public (soaps, creams, etc.) are scent-free. Care should be taken not to use any scented products, such as, air fresheners, scented candles, etc., within the building.

## RESOURCES

[www.aseq-ehaq.ca](http://www.aseq-ehaq.ca)

[www.nottoopretty.org](http://www.nottoopretty.org)

[www.teensturninggreen.org](http://www.teensturninggreen.org)

[www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2005/2/perfume-an-investigation-of.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/planet-2/report/2005/2/perfume-an-investigation-of.pdf)

Skin Deep – [www.cosmeticsdatabase.com](http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com)

Debra Lynn Dadd – [www.dld123.com/index.html](http://www.dld123.com/index.html)

Annie Berthold Bond – [www.anniebbond.com](http://www.anniebbond.com)

David Suzuki Foundation "Dirty Dozen" - [www.davidsuzuki.org/dirtydozen](http://www.davidsuzuki.org/dirtydozen)

Breast Cancer Action Montreal - [www.bcam.qc.ca](http://www.bcam.qc.ca)

## BOOKS

The Safe Shopper's Bible – David Steinman & Samuel Epstein, MD

Toxic Beauty – Samuel Epstein, MD

Clean and Green – Annie Berthold Bond

Consumer's Dictionary of Cosmetic Ingredients, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition - Ruth Winter

## Environmental Sensitivities Defined

Environmental sensitivities can occur when people become sensitive to substances or phenomena in their everyday environment at levels well below what would be considered to be acceptable to "normal" people. Sensitivity reactions can be triggered by scented products, cleaning products, laundry detergents, paints, petrochemicals, cigarette smoke, pesticides, pets, plants, fuels, electromagnetic radiation, molds and foods.

The effect of environmental sensitivities can be overwhelming. Productive people may suddenly or gradually become unable to tolerate offices, homes, schools, hospitals and public places. Employers, who may or may not be aware of the problem, may refuse to make the accommodations necessary to allow people affected to continue working in safety. Many people with sensitivities lose their jobs if they are not provided with the accommodations they need to work productively. Some become homeless. All too often, retirement savings are depleted and debts are incurred in an attempt to create safe living conditions and to fund the cost of treatment. Treatment of these problems can be expensive and difficult to obtain, and includes avoidance of offending agents. Some people with sensitivities do improve after many years if they are able to find a safe environment in which to live and work, and if they can obtain (and afford) treatments that are both tolerable and effective for them. Sadly, despite skills and education, some people with sensitivities end up on social assistance. Many become socially isolated as they are forced to retreat from places and activities they love, and for some, the devastation extends to losing spouses, family and friends who may not believe that they are ill.

The disability may be invisible, but it is real. Like others with disabilities, persons with sensitivities have special needs which include, but are not limited to: housing in a safe and tolerable environment so that their bodies can heal, well-tolerated,

environmentally safe products available at a reasonable cost, consumer self-help groups, a support system, tolerable meeting places, publicly funded treatments, safe hospitals, schools and other public facilities, and accommodation in the workplace. Like all Canadians, we are entitled to freedom from discriminatory treatment, which includes the right to accessible workplaces, accommodation and public facilities. Notably, environmental sensitivities have been recognized as disabilities by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and many provincial human rights commissions.

ASEQ-EHAQ receives calls for help from persons with ES. There is no comprehensive treatment center in Quebec for people with sensitivities. Many conventional medical doctors have not been trained to recognize or treat environmental sensitivities. Generally, hospitals are not equipped to accommodate persons with sensitivities, although health care is considered a universal right.

On the other hand, an environmental health clinic, funded by the government of Nova Scotia, treats thousands of patients. The Canadian Medical Association has indicated that "there are many physicians who are acutely aware of the problems of environmental sensitivities ... have expertise in this area and are addressing the needs of patients with ... sensitivities". The Ontario College of Family Physicians trains doctors to recognize and treat environmental sensitivities. In Ottawa, several doctors treat patients with sensitivities and report that they have several thousand patients. Many Quebecers travel there at their own expense for consultation and treatment.

It is time now for Quebec to take care of the chemically injured.

If you or your family or friends have environmental sensitivities, we urge you to contact us for assistance. We also need the talents and skills of those of you who are well, whether you are family or friends who wish to help, or you are simply concerned about the effects of the environment on human health.

### Possible symptoms include:

- Nervous system – heightened sense of smell; Difficulty concentrating and remembering; variability in mental processing; feeling dull, groggy or spacey; headache, pain, restlessness, hyperactivity, agitation, insomnia, depression, lack of coordination or balance, anxiety, seizures, tinnitus, fatigue, tension, confusion, memory loss, dizziness
- Upper Respiratory System - frequent colds, stuffy nose, itchy nose, blocked ears, sinus stuffiness and pain and infections
- Lower Respiratory System – cough, wheezing, shortness of breath, heavy chest, asthma, frequent bronchitis or pneumonia
- Eyes – red, watery eyes; dark circles under eyes; pain in eyes; disturbed vision
- Gastrointestinal System – excessive salivation, heartburn, nausea, bloating, constipation, abdominal pain, diarrhea
- Endocrine System – fatigue, lethargy, blood sugar fluctuations
- Musculoskeletal System– joint and muscle pain in the extremities and/or back; swollen limbs; muscle twitching, spasm or weakness
- Cardiovascular System- rapid or irregular heartbeat, cold extremities, high or low blood pressure
- Skin (Integumentary system) – Flushing (whole body, or isolated such as ears, nose or cheeks), hives, eczema, other rashes, itching
- Genitourinary System – frequency and urgency to urinate, painful bladder spasms

### Some factors which contribute to the development of ES:

- Exposure to chemicals such as solvents and pesticides or biological contaminants such as mold
- Long term exposure to low levels of hazardous substances, chronic low level exposure, at work and at home
- A single overwhelming exposure such as a chemical spill

**Reports****The legal perspective of Environmental Sensitivities**[http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/legal\\_sensitivity\\_en.pdf](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/legal_sensitivity_en.pdf)**The Medical Perspective of Environmental Sensitivities**[http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/envsensitivity\\_en.pdf](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/pdf/envsensitivity_en.pdf)

You can obtain a copy of these reports at no charge at: 1-888-214-1090 then select 'publications'.

**Policy on Environmental Sensitivities**[http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation\\_policies/policy\\_environ\\_politique-en.asp](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/legislation_policies/policy_environ_politique-en.asp)

## In Appreciation

The ASEQ/EHAQ would like to sincerely thank all of our volunteers, contributors, donors and sponsors since its inception in 2004. Due to your generosity, we are able to provide support services and other programs to help people who suffer from environmental sensitivities and educate the public on least toxic strategies to protect human health and the environment.

## Editor's Note

Dear friends and members,

On behalf of the Environmental Health Association of Quebec I would like to thank you for your support and continued involvement with the organization. We are doing our best to keep you abreast of important health and environmental issues and are constantly striving to bring awareness to the community about the seriousness of Environmental Sensitivities – which encompass Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, Electromagnetic Sensitivity and other sensitivities.

This is a disabling health problem suffered by many, but often in silence. We invite you to share your story with us and help spread the word about this important issue. If you have information that would be useful to others on any aspect of human health and the environment, adverse reaction stories, your journey back to health, your experience living with environmental sensitivity, etc., please forward it to us for inclusion in the next Bulletin: [office@aseq-ehaq.ca](mailto:office@aseq-ehaq.ca). (If requested, names will be kept confidential). We are also always on the lookout for natural, chemical and pesticide free products, as well as healthful recipes, and tips and advise to share with our readers.

Together, we can show how simple changes can make a big difference in everyone's overall health and well-being.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Alana Vineberg  
Editor

## Report your adverse reactions:

Pesticide Incident Reporting:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pest/part/protect-proteger/incident/index-eng.php>

Cosmetics Product Ingredient Labeling:

[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/cosmet\\_prod-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/prod/cosmet_prod-eng.php)

Cosmetic adverse reaction reporting:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/media/advisories-avis/reaction-eng.php>

## Newsletter Contributors

**Rohini Peris, Alana Vineberg, Laurel Maloney,  
Nathalie Doiron — Writers**

**Alana Vineberg — Layout**

**Alana Vineberg, Rohini Peris, Solène Deshaies,  
Paula McKeown, Michel Gaudet — Editing**

**Rohini Peris — Advertising and Distribution**

**Judith Richardson — Website**

**Claude Renaud — Translation**

**Jean-François Desourdy — Graphic Art**

## HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

We at EHAQ, through our volunteer work:

1. Do our best to help people who live with this medical condition, and
2. Inform the general public on ecological strategies that are safe for human health and the environment.

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Rates: business card, \$35; quarter page, \$45 dollars; half page, \$85; full page\$160; Inside back/or/front cover, \$500.

ASEQ/EHAQ is looking for volunteers in the following areas:

English to French translation; data entry; graphic artist; setting and closing of tables at AGM; help at support meetings for set up and closing; manning of booths the Salon National de L'Environnement, June 2011; preparing and writing funding requests.

**Disclaimer:** Products and services advertised in Eco-Journal are not necessarily safe for everyone with environmental sensitivities. It is the responsibility of the individual to assess all products before use.



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SITE WEB / WEBSITE: [www.aseq-ehaq.ca](http://www.aseq-ehaq.ca)



More than one million Canadians suffer from Environmental Sensitivities. ***We can help you!***

Common symptoms: hives, muscular spasms, depression, nausea, asthma, heightened sense of smell, difficulty concentrating and/or remembering, variability in mental processing, headache, flushing (whole body, or isolated such as ears, nose or cheeks), confusion, dizziness, high or low blood pressure, eczema, skin eruptions, swollen limbs, memory loss, insomnia, pain



**Environmental Health Association of Quebec**

Educate yourself / become a member / make a donation: [www.aseq-ehaq.ca](http://www.aseq-ehaq.ca)