

MEDIA RELEASE

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One in three Australians report health problems from fragranced consumer products

A University of Melbourne researcher has found that one-third of Australians report health problems — ranging from migraine headaches to asthma attacks — when exposed to common fragranced consumer products such as air fresheners, cleaning products, laundry supplies, and personal care products.

The [research](#) was conducted by Anne Steinemann, Professor of Civil Engineering and Chair of Sustainable Cities, from the University of Melbourne School of Engineering and published in the journal *Preventive Medicine Reports*.

When exposed to fragranced products, 33 per cent of Australians suffer adverse health effects, such as breathing difficulties, headaches, dizziness, rashes, congestion, seizures, nausea, and a range of other physical problems.

The results mirrored those from similar research Professor Steinemann conducted in the United States, which found 34.7 per cent of people experienced health problems when exposed to fragranced products.

“This is an epidemic,” Professor Steinemann said. “Fragranced products are creating health problems across Australia. The effects can be immediate, severe and potentially disabling,” she said. “But they can also be subtle, and people may not realise they're being affected.”

Professor Steinemann conducted a nationally representative population survey in Australia, using a random sample of 1,098 people from a large, web-based panel held by Survey Sampling International (SSI).

The research found 7.7 per cent of Australians have lost workdays or a job in the past year due to illness from fragranced product exposure in the workplace, and 16.7 per cent want to leave a shop or business as quickly as possible if they smell air fresheners or other fragranced products.

“These findings have serious implications for businesses, workplaces, care facilities, schools, homes and other places – for anywhere or anyone that uses fragranced products,” Professor Steinemann said.

Professor Steinemann's [previous research](#) showed fragranced products emit a range of chemicals, including hazardous air pollutants, but ingredients do not need to be fully disclosed on the product label or safety data sheet.

“All types of fragranced products tested—even those with claims of ‘green,’ ‘organic,’ and ‘all-natural’—emitted hazardous air pollutants,” she said.

Her research continues to investigate why fragrance chemicals are causing health problems, and the implications for indoor environments. “As my study found, about twice as many Australians would prefer that workplaces, health care facilities and professionals, hotels, and aeroplanes were fragrance-free rather than fragranced,” said Professor Steinemann.

Media enquiries: Professor Anne Steinemann | +61 3 8344 5001 |
anne.steinemann@unimelb.edu.au

- The full article is available, free of charge, on Professor Steinemann's website:
<http://www.drsteinemann.com/publications.html> (top article)
or on the journal website:
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335516301449>

- Professor Steinemann will feature this research at a free public lecture on Tuesday 28 March, 6:00pm-7:30pm, at the University of Melbourne.
The event is open to everyone and without cost.
To attend, please register at: <http://go.unimelb.edu.au/mcn6>

Additional Information:

- Fragranced consumer products included one or more of the following: (a) Air fresheners and deodorizers (e.g., sprays, solids, oils, disks); (b) Personal care products (e.g., soaps, hand sanitizer, lotions, deodorant, sunscreen, shampoos); (c) Cleaning supplies (e.g., all-purpose cleaners, disinfectants, and dishwashing soap); (d) Laundry products (e.g., detergents, fabric softeners, dryer sheets); (e) Household products (e.g., scented candles, toilet paper, trash bags, baby products); (f) Fragrance (e.g., perfume, cologne, after-shave), and (g) Other.

- Health effects included one or more of the following (with percentage of the population affected): (a) Migraine headaches (10.0%); (b) Asthma attacks (7.6%); (c) Neurological problems (4.5%), e.g., dizziness, seizures, head pain, fainting, loss of coordination; (d) Respiratory problems (16.7%), e.g., difficulty breathing, coughing, shortness of breath; (e) Skin problems (9.5%), e.g., rashes, hives, red skin, tingling skin, dermatitis; (f) Cognitive problems (4.1%), e.g., difficulties thinking, concentrating, or remembering; (g) Mucosal symptoms (14.0%), e.g., watery or red eyes, nasal congestion, sneezing; (h) Immune system problems (3.3%), e.g., swollen lymph glands, fever, fatigue; (i) Gastrointestinal problems (3.3%), e.g., nausea, bloating, cramping, diarrhoea; (j) Cardiovascular problems (3.0%), e.g., fast or irregular heartbeat, jitteriness, chest discomfort; (k) Musculoskeletal problems (2.6%), e.g., muscle or joint pain, cramps, weakness; and (l) Other health problems (1.9%).

- Fragranced consumer products are exempt from full disclosure of ingredients to the public. For air fresheners, cleaning supplies, laundry products, and other consumer products, labels are not required to list all ingredients, or the presence of a fragrance in the product. For personal care products and cosmetics, labels are required to list ingredients, except the general term "fragrance" may be used instead of listing the individual ingredients in the fragrance. For all products, material safety data sheets are not required to list all ingredients. Fragrance ingredients are exempt from full disclosure in any product, not only in the U.S. but also internationally.