

Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services

‘Procedure for Burning Traditional and Sacred Medicines’

1.0 Introduction & Purpose

In implementing the Smoke Free Campus Policy, McMaster University recognizes the unique and spiritual relationship that many Indigenous cultures have with Traditional and Sacred Medicines such as tobacco, sweet grass, sage, and cedar, among others.

This procedure is intended to recognize that the use of these Traditional and Sacred Medicines for ceremonial purposes is separate and distinct from the ‘recreational’ use of tobacco, and other substances, and as such is not subject to the same restrictions outlined in the Smoke Free Campus Policy.

The primary goals of this procedure are:

- To ensure that Indigenous ceremonial practices are recognized and supported on campus;
- To ensure the health and safety of all campus community members; and
- To prevent miscommunication (false fire alarms, smoke reports, etc.)

2.0 Scope

This Procedure applies to all Members of the University Community (“Community Members”).

Community Members include, but are not limited to: students (graduate, undergraduate, and continuing education), staff, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, adjunct professors, visiting professors, sessional faculty, teaching assistants, clinical faculty, librarians, medical residents, volunteers, visitors, observers, contractors, and institutional administrators and officials representing McMaster University.

3.0 Procedure

3.1 Large Events or Ceremonies:

The burning of Traditional and Sacred Medicines for large events or ceremonies held in common areas or spaces that will be shared by non-participants or bystanders, and/or ceremonies where use of Traditional and Sacred Medicines will be expected to take place for an extended period of time will require advance notification.

This process will include notification to Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services at least 5 days before the scheduled event in order to assess the need for further action with respect to ventilation, fire safety, and alarm systems. This may include notification of McMaster University Security Services, as well as, Facilities Services. Requests at off- site campus locations should be directed through the appropriate building management and security group or groups.

3.2 Small Group or Private Ceremonies:

Traditional and Sacred Medicines are most commonly used in private or small groups and are of a brief duration in semi-private spaces. Individuals using Traditional and Sacred Medicines in this manner are expected to notify Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services prior to conducting this activity. On evenings and weekends, notification should be provide to McMaster University Security Services.

3.3 Notification:

Individuals who wish to burn Traditional and Sacred Medicines are expected to make all reasonable efforts to notify anyone in the vicinity that may be negatively impacted by smoke.

3.4 Fire and Life Safety:

Individuals participating should be aware of their nearest fire extinguisher, fire exit, and fire alarm pull station.

Individuals who burn Traditional and Sacred Medicines must also take steps to fully extinguish and or dispose of all materials remaining after the burning of sacred medicines.

4.0 Exemptions

At the following locations:

- Indigenous Student Services and Indigenous Studies Program (ISS/ISP) offices at 1811 L.R. Wilson Hall;
- Outdoor Courtyard adjacent to the ISS/ISP offices: and the
- Indigenous Circle/Gathering Place (Nibwaakaawin Teg/Karhakon kateweiens'tha)

5.0 Applicable Legislation

- a. Ontario Human Rights Code
- b. Canadian Human Rights Act
- c. Constitution Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- d. Tobacco Control Act, 1994

e. Smoking in the Workplace Act, 1990

f. Ontario Fire Code (O. Reg. 213/07)

For more information please contact Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services 905-525-9140 ext. 24352 or eohts@mcmaster.ca.