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SENSELESS SCENT PATROL

BY MICHAEL FUMENTO

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They say the Canadian Mounties always get their man. They did this time, though their man was a 17-year-old boy. The heinous crime for which he was sought? Wearing Aqua Velva cologne and Dippity Do hair gel to his school near Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Don't get me wrong; I think any guy who wears Dippity Do should be sent down to Singapore for a good caning. And Aqua Velva? Please.

But the actual offense was violating his school's ban on anything with a fragrance. Anything. And laugh if you want at those silly Canadians, but their fragrance phobia may prove the first successful invasion of the U.S. since the War of 1812.

It all began in Halifax, about a decade ago.

Now, about 80 percent of Halifax's 146 schools now have some form of scent-free policy. Anti-fragrance policies also appear to be the norm at most of the city's workplaces. Most of the city's public institutions, and a number of private businesses, now request or demand that workers be scent-free.

The *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* prohibits its 350 employees from using perfume, aftershave, scented deodorant, shampoo or even strong-smelling mouthwash on the job.

A 1,400-employee telephone service center has declared itself off-limits to fragrance. Reminders pop up on computer screens when employees log on, presumably reading "Big Brother Is Smelling You." Warning signs are posted in toilets reminding workers not to use toiletries. Violators are sent home to take a shower (No soap or shampoo, please) on unpaid time.

Now the phobia is spreading. In Ottawa, the public bus system discourages wearing fragranced products, while a local hospital has embarked on a No Scents Is Good Sense campaign. On Prince Edward Island, off the East Coast, a joint declaration from an employer and its union recently recommended banning perfumes and aftershaves from government offices.

And although Canada is hardly litigious compared to the United States, a Toronto resident filed suit against a neighbor for invading her air space with cooking smells.

Stifle that smirk, though. Such lunacy may be coming soon to a neighborhood near you.

In early April, the *New York Times* ran an article titled, "Banned from Classroom: Scented Products." In it we are told, Students at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury taking any of [the classes of two professors] receive more than a syllabus when they first meet. They obtain a list of what they can't wear or bring to class, including perfume, scented soap, deodorants, shampoos and conditioners, hair spray, mousse, freshly dry-cleaned clothes and chewing gum.

And that doesn't mean popping or cracking gum, which ought to be a capital offense. Just having the gum in your person is forbidden. Whether full-body searches are required, the article does not say.

There is not the least hint in the *Times* piece that the Multiple Chemical Sensitivity the professors claim to suffer has been disavowed by such astute bodies as the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology, the Board of the International Society of Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology and the American College of Physicians.

Indeed, there's nothing that qualifies as science that indicates that -while a few persons among hundreds of millions may have allergic reactions to this perfume or that deodorant-there is anybody with a true health reaction to artificial smells as a whole anymore than there is anybody who reacts to any product beginning with the letter "f."



Graphic by Rich Pope, *The Washington Times*