

## Museum Scent Events: Safety and Conservation Checklist

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If you're planning on incorporating scent into your events, then it's likely that your organisation will need to factor this activity into your Risk Assessments.

On the whole, fragrance is safe to use, and the perception of hazard among institutions is greater than the reality. There is a bit of misinformation about scent, including that naturals are much safer than 'artificial' smells.

So it's important to minimise risk while at the same time being confident in your activity. But if you go through this check-list, which covers both safety and conservation considerations, you will be well-prepared ahead of your event. You could also speak to your insurer to double-check your plans.

This advice is best read having been through the [Museums at Night Scent Events tips and resources article](#).

### CONSERVATION

1. Find out from the conservation representative any restrictions on introducing plant-based scents into an exhibition space. Sometimes fragile or ancient historical collections need to be kept free of any biological materials (eg. leaves, herbs, fresh flowers).
2. Find out from the conservation representative if they are happy in general for fragrances to be incorporated into an event. A good rule of thumb: do they prevent visitors coming in who are wearing perfume? If not, then there is no reason to restrict the use of commercially available scents if used appropriately.
3. If there are issues bringing any fragrances, even pre-sprayed and dried perfumes, into the space, then consider holding that part of the talk away from the exhibition floor, and then inviting guests to explore the collection before or after.

### DIFFUSION

1. If you are looking to diffuse fragrances into a space and haven't done this before, then I'd advise you to get a specialist's help.
2. In general it is best if you use 'cold diffusion' machines, which put fragrance into a dry form and use fans to disperse the scent (no heating is included). As no liquids are involved this makes negligible the evaporation of Volatile Organic Compounds into the room. The parts per million (PPM) of a fragrance material is also negligible which means low hazard risk as there are no droplets settling onto artworks or being inhaled.
3. Make sure that you have requested a Safety Data Sheet for any fragrances you plan to diffuse (providers can supply these). As above, if you use dry diffusion, the PPM will be low, but you will need these on-hand to show in relation to workplace Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).

## AUDIENCE COMMUNICATION

1. When selling tickets for an event and/or advertising the session, make it clear that it will involve smelling scents and that those with identified allergies to perfume should avoid the session.
2. Produce a sign on arrival reminding audience members that fragrances are being incorporated into the session.
3. At the beginning of the session communicate to audiences how the fragrance will be dispersed, and if sampling strips are handed round, mention that people shouldn't eat them, put them up their nose, or poke their eye with them. Ask them to wash their hands after the session.
4. At the end of the session have a bin available and ask participants to dispose of any unwanted scent strips before leaving.

## PREPARING FRAGRANCES

1. Make sure one designated person is responsible for preparing fragrances.
2. Source some disposable gloves to avoid spilling liquids on your hands.
3. If using perfumes or alcohol based scents, it is best if you spray onto porous cardboard, either professional fragrance tester strips (like you get at the perfume counter), or cut-up pieces of watercolour paper from an art shop. Dip or spray scents in advance and let them dry off. If you're doing this more than an hour before you start, then keep the strips sealed in plastic sleeves to prevent all the scent evaporating.
4. If you're using non-alcohol-based scents (eg. resins, incense grains etc) then put them in small boxes to pass round, perhaps with a lid and a hole for smelling, to make sure people aren't handling them directly. You can do the same with essential oils by dropping a couple of drops neat onto cotton wool, and then putting this into the container.
5. Don't use neat essential oils on smelling strips! Make sure you dilute essential oils to 5% strength. I'd advise using a material called Isopropyl Myristate which is a safe, alcohol-free solution. Do not encourage participants to put essential oils on the skin - if involving a qualified aromatherapist, they should be diluted to 2% before applying.

## FIRST AID

Keep a first aid kit to hand including saline water. If any audience member gets fragrance in their eyes, an identified member of staff should accompany them to a bathroom to make sure they rinse out their eyes using first aid products if needed, and call a medical professional if required.