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Guidelines for Indigenous Smudge Ceremony

As part of the Ontario Federation of Labour's (OFL) commitment to be inclusive and culturally responsive, this guideline has been produced to better enable the Federation to integrate First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives into its planning and programming.

Under Section 13 of Ontario Smoke Free Act smudging, the use of tobacco, the smoking of tobacco or holding lighted tobacco by First Nations and Métis persons for traditional First Nations and Metis cultural or spiritual purposes are permitted. The OFL recognizes that smudging and pipe ceremonies are a part of the Indigenous traditional way of life and are therefore welcomed on its premises and events.

Background:

What is Smudging?

Smudging is a tradition, common to many First Nations and Métis, which involves the burning of one or more medicines gathered from the earth. The four sacred medicines used in First Nations' ceremonies are tobacco, sage, cedar and sweetgrass. The most common medicines used in a smudge are sweetgrass, sage and cedar. Smudging has been passed down from generation to generation. There are many ways and variations on how a smudge is done. Historically, Métis and Inuit people did not smudge; however, today many Métis and Inuit people have incorporated smudging into their lives.

Smudging allows people to stop, slow down, become mindful and centred. This allows people to remember, connect and be grounded in the event, task or purpose at hand. Smudging also allows people to let go of negativities. Letting go of things that inhibit a person from being balanced and focused comes from the feeling of being calm and safe while smudging. The forms of smudging will vary from nation to nation but are considered by all to be a way of cleansing oneself. Smudging is part of "the way things are done" and is part of living a good life.

Smudging is always voluntary. People should never be forced or pressured to smudge. It is completely acceptable for a person to indicate that they do not want to smudge, and that person may choose to stay in the room and refrain or leave the room during a smudge. Respect for all is the guiding principle in any Aboriginal tradition.

The following are steps and rationale for the cleaning process – smudge:



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- We smudge to clear the air around us.
- We smudge to clean our minds so that we will have good thoughts of others.
- We smudge our eyes so that we will only see the good in others.
- We smudge our ears so that we will only listen to positive things about others.
- We smudge our mouths so that we will only speak of well of others.
- We smudge our whole being, so we will portray only the good part of our self through our actions.

In First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, Elders^[1] and traditional teachers^[2] play a prominent, vital and respected role. Elders and traditional teachers are held in high regard as they are the knowledge keepers^[3]. They are leaders, teachers, role models and mentors in their respective communities, who sometimes provide the same functions as advisors and professors.

How Do We Smudge?

The act of clearing the air, mind, spirit and emotions may be accomplished in a variety of ways, but according to First Nations' practice, **a smudge is led by a person who understands what it is and why it is done.** That person may be an Elder or traditional teacher who has been invited to a labour event or a staff person who is knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging.

The medicine is placed in a smudge container. The container may be a shell, a ceramic or stone bowl, a copper, brass or cast-iron pan. The medicine is lit with a match. Once the medicine is lit, the smoke may be pushed forward with a feather or a fan. The person who lights the smudge is first.

The commonly used medicine in schools is sage. A "smudge ball" is created mainly from the leaf of the plant, which is rolled into a ball for burning. It is important to understand that this medicine can create a significant billow of smoke, which emerges from the smudge ball. It is not necessary to create enough smoke to fill the entire space where a group is smudging. Only a small stream of smoke for the person who is smudging is required. Therefore, it is important for the helpers who create the smudge ball to keep it relatively small.



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When we smudge, we first cleanse our hands with the smoke as if we were washing our hands. We then draw the smoke over our heads, eyes, ears, mouths and our bodies. These actions remind us to think good thoughts, see good actions, hear good sounds, speak good words and show the good of who we are.



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Guidelines:

1. A staff/committee member should provide at least 48 hours advanced notice, internally and externally to participants, that a smudge will be lit on a specific day, time and place.
2. With guidance from the person who is leading the smudge, a staff/committee member will identify where and when smudging will be allowed at an event/gathering place. The staff member will also ensure the necessary materials for the smudge ceremony is acquired.
3. A staff/committee member should notify the venue at least 24 hours prior to a labour event that a smudging ceremony is planned.
4. On the event/meeting day, signs should be posted at the venue to indicate that a smudge ceremony is scheduled or in progress. Signs can include the following:
 - **Today, an Indigenous Smudging Ceremony will occur in this gathering space. Smudging is often part of a labour function. All are welcome to participate as a matter of choice.**
5. Prior to the start of a ceremony, a staff/committee member should ensure that smudging does not pose a health risk to attendees, particularly individuals with severe asthma and respiratory issues.
 - If the ceremony **does** pose a health risk to attendees, particularly individuals with severe asthma and respiratory issues, the staff/committee member should work with the Elder or person leading the smudge to identify a different space/location outside the meeting space to hold the ceremony.
6. At the event, an introduction of the tradition of smudging should include an Elder or traditional teacher who can explain smudging, the medicines, the teachings and the protocols.





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7. In the past, First Nations and Métis cultural traditions were illegal, and smudging was a practice that had to be done in secret. It is important that when a smudge is lit, it is done with respect for those who choose not to be involved, as well as those who choose to be involved.
8. An Elder or traditional teacher, invited by the event organizer or a staff person who is knowledgeable about the tradition of smudging, will lead the ceremony.
9. During the ceremony, a staff/committee member must ensure that no burning materials are left unattended and that all burning material are doused immediately after the conclusion of the smudging ceremony.