

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 Métis 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.

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 people and Inuit did not smudge; however, today many Métis people and Inuit have incorporated smudging into their lives.

Smudging allows people to stop, slow down, become mindful and centered. 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 Indigenous tradition.

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

- 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 well of others.
- We smudge our whole being, so we will portray only the good part of ourselves through our actions.



In First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, Elders¹ and traditional teachers² play a prominent, vital, and respected role. Elders and traditional teachers are held in high regard as they are the knowledge keepers³.

They are leaders, teachers, role models, and mentors in their respective communities, who sometimes provide the same functions as advisors and professors.

GUIDELINES:

1. A staff/committee member should provide at least 48 hours advance notice, internally and externally to participants, that a smudge will be lit on a specific day, time, and place. This allows those who have health challenges to excuse themselves, or arrive later when the ceremony has finished.
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 members will also ensure the necessary materials for the smudge ceremony are 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

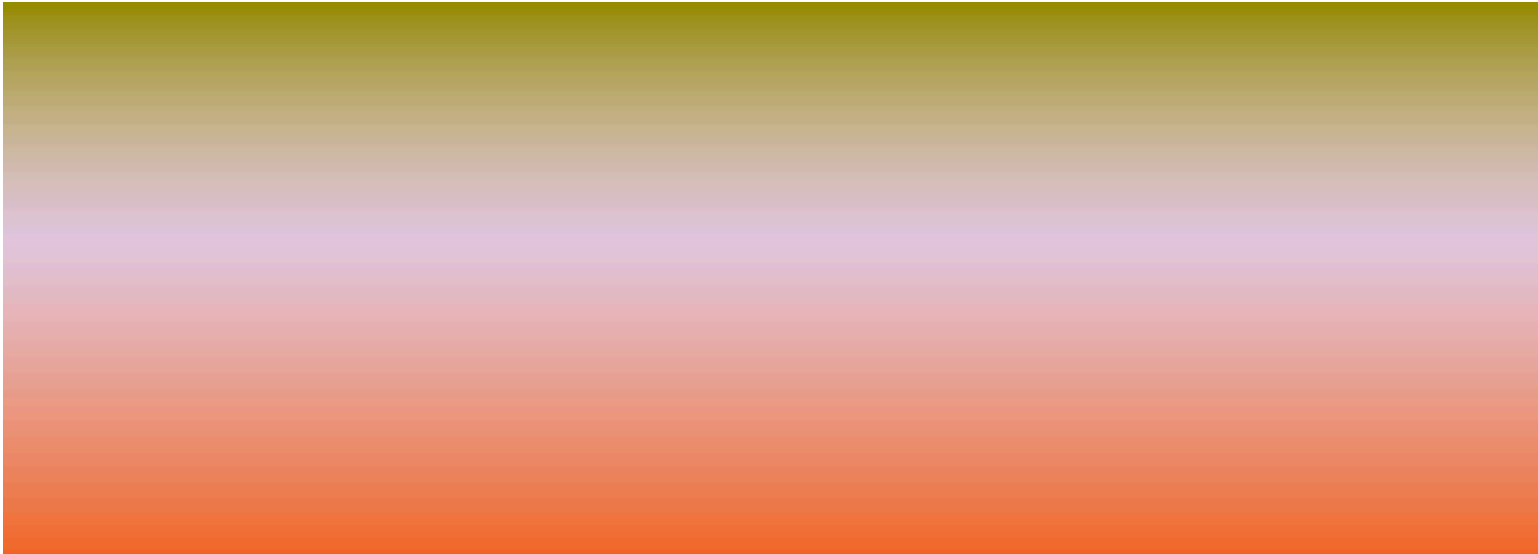
6. At the event, an introduction of the tradition of smudging should include an Elder or traditional teacher who can explain smudging, the medicines, the teachings, and the protocols.
7. In the past, First Nations and Métis cultural traditions were illegal, and smudging was a practice that had to be 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 materials are doused immediately after the conclusion of the smudge ceremony.
10. There are also smudging ceremonies which don't use smoke, but instead use cedar water in a copper bowl or spray bottle.
11. Additionally there is the ability to have the smudge ceremony the night before, which allows some to participate but ensures that the smoke is gone by the day of.

Endnotes:

- 1 For the purpose of this document, the term 'Elder' will be used to refer to both Elders and traditional teachers.
- 2 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders are acknowledged by their respective communities as an 'Elder' through a community selection process. Gender and age are not factors in determining who is an Elder. Traditional teachers are those individuals learning under the mentorship and guidance of an Elder.
- 3 Knowledge keepers hold traditional knowledge and information passed down through oral history, customs, and traditions which encompass beliefs, values, worldviews, language, and spiritual ways of life.
- 4 In some Métis communities Senators replace Eders.



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