

Unitarian Church of Montpelier – Policy Regarding Use of Allergenic Volatile Organic Chemicals (VOCs) and Toxic Materials on Church Property

Adopted by Executive Committee 12/15/09

Many modern products and materials cause adverse reactions in sensitive individuals. Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) that cause these reactions are commonly found in aromatics and scents, some art materials, cleaning products, and construction materials. Pesticides and other toxic materials can also have uncertain and long-lasting effects on humans.

As a general policy, the Unitarian Church of Montpelier will minimize the use of VOCs and toxic materials within and around the church building. Specific policies for each class of product are outlined below.

Aromatics and Scents

Candles used at church events will be unscented. The burning of incense, sage, and other scented or combustible products will be avoided and discouraged. However, some spiritual traditions use such products as part of their sacred rituals; therefore, if permission is given (for example, by the Minister or the Worship & Arts Committee) to conduct a particular ritual requiring the use of a product that will emit allergenic VOCs, the congregation must be notified from the pulpit and warned via other suitable media in advance.

Members and other attendees at church events are requested to refrain from wearing perfumes, colognes, and other strongly-scented personal hygiene products. The Property Committee will ensure that at least one sign to this effect is posted in the church. Reminders will periodically appear in other announcement media.

Art Materials

Markers, paints, craft glues, and other arts-and-crafts materials – especially those that may be used by or around children – must be “non-toxic” and free of VOCs.

Cleaning Products

Storage and use of the following types of products should be avoided to the maximum extent feasible: aerosols, ammonia, bleach, lye, solvents, petroleum distillates, aromatic hydrocarbons, mineral spirits, benzene, toluene, and xylene. When use of such a product is unavoidable (e.g. bleach required by food-service regulations, paint solvent required to clean brushes, etc.), the product should be stored off-premises if feasible, and in any case with caps securely closed and out of reach of children. Products with the following types of labels will be avoided: flammable, combustible, corrosive, reactive, toxic, irritant, poison, “warning,” “danger,” “keep out of reach of children,” “dispose of properly,” and “harmful if swallowed.” It is especially important never to mix products containing ammonia and chlorine bleach, as they create a toxic gas when mixed.

In lieu of the above products, church staff and volunteers should make every effort to use cleaning products made from relatively benign household materials such as white vinegar, lemon juice, baking soda, washing soda, borax, vegetable-oil-based liquid soaps, carnauba or beeswax, and olive oil.

Anti-bacterial soaps should be avoided as they contribute to the development of resistant strains of bacteria. For hands and dishes, products will be sought that use alcohol or plant oils (rather than petroleum compounds, butyl cellosolve, or triclosan).

The Property Committee will oversee the acquisition, adequate supply, storage and disposal of cleaning products, and will oversee storage and disposal of any of the dangerous materials described above. Hazardous materials disposal must be through hazardous waste collections, not in drains, toilets or trash containers. The Property Committee will also oversee the placement of signs in relevant locations to ensure that staff, volunteers and renters comply with this policy.

Construction Materials

Construction or repairs that involve the use of paint, coatings, and/or adhesives will normally be performed during the summer break, with the last such materials applied at least a week before church activities resume in September. Low-risk materials (e.g. low-VOC and no-VOC materials) will be used whenever practicable, especially if it is necessary to apply them during the church year. Interior paint applied during the church year must be no-VOC paint. Regular paint may be used on the exterior at any time. These restrictions may be suspended, if necessary, during emergency repairs.

When a product is used during the church year that foreseeably could emit VOCs or other toxins, or create an adverse health impact, the congregation will be notified from the pulpit and warned via other suitable media in advance.

VOC-emitting carpet should not be used in the building. Other types of flooring, lumber, and construction materials should be chosen with the health of the congregation in mind.

Pesticides

Pesticides should not be used in the building or on church property. If a problem arises involving plant or animal pests, methods of natural control should be researched and used whenever possible. In an urgent situation where only a pesticide will be effective, the congregation must be notified from the pulpit and warned via other suitable media in advance. Proper precautions must be followed in applying the pesticide, and a notice will remain posted for at least 30 days after the application.