



SMUDGING PROTOCOL

for the Burning of Traditional
and Sacred Medicines

Equity and
Inclusion Office

McMaster
University 

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SMUDGING PROTOCOL FOR THE BURNING OF TRADITIONAL AND SACRED MEDICINES ("THE SMUDGING PROTOCOL")

McMaster University sits on the traditional Territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations, and within the lands protected by the "Dish With One Spoon" wampum agreement.

-Indigenous Education Council, May 2016

PURPOSE OF THE SMUDGING PROTOCOL

McMaster University recognizes the right of Indigenous-identified peoples to engage in their cultural and spiritual ceremonies on campus. Smudging is one such ceremony and includes the burning of four (4) sacred medicines: sage, tobacco, cedar and sweetgrass.

The purpose of the Smudging Protocol is to affirm the right of Indigenous peoples to engage in Smudging on campus. This right is upheld by the University's *"Procedure for Burning Traditional and Sacred Medicines"* which recognizes that *"the use of these Traditional and Sacred Medicines for ceremonial purposes is separate and distinct from the 'recreational' use of tobacco, and other substances, and as such is not subject to the same restrictions outlined in the Tobacco & Smoke Free University Policy"*.

The Smudging Protocol serves to provide information and guidance to the McMaster community in order that Indigenous-identified individuals and groups are affirmed and supported when they engage in their cultural and spiritual practices, including Smudging.

WHAT IS SMUDGING?

Smudging is an Indigenous ceremony passed down through generations and engaged in by many First Nations people.

The burning of sacred medicines creates a small plume of smoke that is used to purify the body, mind and ceremonial or personal space and to cleanse away any negative energy and emotions.

Smudging is always **voluntary**. It is acceptable for a person to indicate that they do not want to Smudge. The person who chooses to refrain from the Smudge may stay in the room while others are Smudging or they may choose to quietly leave the room until the Smudge has been completed.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS FOR THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Historically, the intent of colonial policies implemented by the Government of Canada was to 'assimilate' Indigenous peoples by forcing them off their lands, removing children from their parents and homes and placing them into residential schools. Indigenous peoples were forced to abandon their cultural and spiritual practices when these practices were outlawed. It is within this historical context that Indigenous peoples have asserted their rights. [The Ontario Human Rights Code](#), [Canadian Human Rights Act](#), [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#) and the [United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) include legal protections for the fundamental right of Indigenous peoples to freely practice their religious and spiritual traditions, and to be treated equally and with dignity.

MCMASTER UNIVERSITY'S COMMITMENT

McMaster University is committed to recognizing and affirming the unique and spiritual relationship that many Indigenous cultures have with Traditional and Sacred Medicines.

McMaster's Commitment includes:

- Recognizing and supporting Indigenous ceremonial practices on campus;
- Ensuring each ceremonial act of Smudging, whether performed by an individual or in a group, is responded to in an informed and respectful fashion.
- Communicating the Smudging Protocol to the campus community in order to ensure that smudging requests are responded to in an informed and respectful manner.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Equity and Inclusion Office is responsible for collaborating with, and taking leadership from, the Indigenous Studies Program/Indigenous Student Services in the development and delivery of education and training to communicate support for this Protocol and to provide information to the campus community. Education and training are aimed at ensuring that members of the campus community have knowledge about the importance of Indigenous ceremonies, including Smudging, and are able to respond in a timely and respectful fashion to an individual's or group's "*Intent to Smudge*" Notice.

SCOPE OF THE SMUDGING PROTOCOL

The Smudging Protocol applies to all Members of the University Community ("Community Members").

- **Community Members include** but are not limited to: students (graduate, undergraduate and continuing education), staff, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, adjunct professors, visiting professors, sessional faculty, teaching assistants, clinical

faculty, librarians, medical residents, volunteers, visitors, observers, contractors, and institutional administrators and officials representing McMaster University.

- **Smudging may take place anywhere on campus.** This includes, but is not limited to, indoor or outdoor classrooms, communal gathering places, Indigenous Studies Program and Indigenous Student Services Ceremonial Space located in L.R. Wilson Hall, Main Floor, Room 1811, and offices whether performed by an individual, groups of individuals or at cultural events, conferences, sports events and/or meetings.
- Please review the [Procedure for Burning Traditional and Sacred Medicines](#) found on the Environmental & Occupational Health Support Services (EOHSS) website.

PERMANENT SMUDGING SITES FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WISHING TO SMUDGE

The following three (3) sites are available to Indigenous people wishing to Smudge and are exempt from any requirement to request an accommodation or to provide notice to the broader campus community.

1. Ceremonial Space, Indigenous Studies Program/Indigenous Student Services, L.R. Wilson Building, Suite 1811. The Ceremonial Space is equipped with a ventilation system that has been designed specifically for Smudging.
2. Indigenous Studies Courtyard located in the rear of the Indigenous Studies Program/Indigenous Student Services within the parameter of the L.R. Wilson Building.
3. Indigenous Circle/Gathering Place (Nibwaakaawin Teg/Karhakon kateweiens'tha) located between the University Club and Whidden Hall.

SMUDGING PROCEDURES

Smudging is performed in a variety of contexts and for different purposes. Individuals may wish to Smudge spontaneously for personal reasons; instructors may use Smudging as a way to engage in or demonstrate Indigenous pedagogies in a classroom; campus groups may wish to Smudge prior to a communal event such as a conference or a meeting.

Individuals will:

- a. Post an '*Intent to Smudge*' Notice on their office or residence door, whenever possible.
- b. Keep their door closed during the Smudging Ceremony.
- c. Post "*Intent to Smudge*" Notices within the vicinity of the Smudging Ceremony, whenever possible.

- d. Arrange with [Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services](#) to have Facility Services perform an initial ventilation and/or fire system assessment of their office or residence room.
- e. Be aware of the nearest fire extinguisher, fire exit and fire alarm pull station.
- f. Ensure that all remnants of the Smudging ceremony are properly taken care of once the Smudge is complete.
- g. Direct all requests at off-site campus locations to the appropriate building management and/or security group(s).

Instructors or Smudging Facilitators for Communal Ceremony will:

- a. Notify [Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services](#) at least five (5) business days before the scheduled event in order to assess the need for action with respect to ventilation, fire safety and alarm systems. Notification should be provided to [McMaster Security Services](#) on evenings or weekends. If five (5) business days is not possible, Instructors/Facilitators are asked to attempt to perform Smudging Ceremonies at one of the three (3) [Permanent Smudging Sites \(see above\)](#).
- b. Inform all participants that participation in the Smudging Ceremony is completely voluntary.
- c. Post "*Intent to Smudge*" Notices within the vicinity of the Smudging Ceremony.
- d. Be aware of the nearest fire extinguisher, fire exit and fire alarm pull station.
- e. Ensure that all remnants of the Smudging ceremony are properly taken care of once the Smudge is complete.

Participants will:

- a. Be aware that participation is absolutely voluntary.
- b. Decline participation respectfully.
- c. Participate in the Smudging Ceremony with knowledge and appreciation of its cultural and spiritual significance.

Observers will:

- a. Observe quietly and without interruption other than for emergency reasons.
- b. Leave the vicinity of the Smudging Ceremony quietly should a Smudging ceremony have a negative medical and/or allergic effect.
- c. Leave freely and quietly, or decline respectfully if choosing to remain, if the Smudging Ceremony conflicts with a personal religious or spiritual belief. Observing or participating in a Smudging Ceremony is completely voluntary.

RESPONDING TO '*INTENT TO SMUDGE*' NOTICES

Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services (EOHHS) will:

- a. Facilitate all Smudging notices received within the five (5) business day timeframe in an efficient and timely manner.
- b. Should the Smudging notice be submitted short of the five (5) business day timeframe, make all reasonable attempts to accommodate the Smudging Ceremony.
- c. Take all necessary steps including, whenever necessary, an assessment of the need for further action with respect to ventilation, fire safety and alarm systems. This may include notification of McMaster University Security Services and/or Facility Services in order to facilitate the Smudging Ceremony.
- d. If accommodations are unable to be met in the location, designate an alternative and culturally sensitive location that is deemed appropriate by the requesting party/individual.

Security Services will:

- a. Be notified of all Smudging notices received after business hours or on weekends.

Programs, Offices or Departments will:

- a. Facilitate Smudging Notices in a timely and informed manner; i.e., contact EOHHS or Security Services of the '*Intent to Smudge*' Notice in order that all necessary steps with respect to ventilation/fire systems can be taken.
- b. Absorb any costs associated with the Smudging Ceremony including overtime hours incurred by Facility Services should the presence of an employee be necessary.

Equity and Inclusion Office will:

- a. Coordinate and deliver education and training opportunities for campus members.
- b. Ensure that curriculum related to Smudging is designed, delivered and/or approved by Indigenous members of the campus.
- c. Inform concerned parties of the Smudging Protocol and facilitate any concerns or complaints that may arise as a result of objections to Smudging or the failure to reasonably accommodate Smudging.

Students in Residence will:

- Inform their Community Advisor/Residence Manager of the "*Intent to Smudge*".
- Review and adhere to the procedures described above.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Ceremony: Ceremony can include but is not limited to singing, dancing, praying and/or the burning of traditional and sacred medicines such as Sage, Tobacco, Cedar and Sweetgrass.

Indigenous Elder: Elders are very important members of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and are people who possess understanding of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit history, traditional teachings, ceremonies, and healing practices.

Indigenous people: Indigenous people are individuals whose ancestors have lived on Turtle Island (the land) since time immemorial. Today on Turtle Island (Canada), Indigenous people are referred to as First Nation, Métis or Inuit (FNMI) people.

Smudging: Smudging is a ceremony performed by many different First Nations peoples, which involves the burning of one or more of the Sacred Medicines collected from the Earth. These medicines typically include, but are not limited to: Sage, Tobacco, Cedar and Sweetgrass. Smudging is done to purify the space and to ensure thoughts and words that are spoken come from a good place.

Sacred Medicines: Often, but not limited to, plants used in traditional events and ceremonies, including Smudging.

ADHERENCE TO RELEVANT POLICIES/PROCEDURES

This Protocol adheres to University's policies, procedures and applicable legislation in order to create an inclusive and equitable environment for Indigenous peoples on campus.

- Tobacco & Smoke Free University Policy
- Procedure for Burning Traditional and Sacred Medicines, *Environmental and Occupational Health Support Services, McMaster University*
- Tobacco Control Act, 1994
- Policy on Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed, *Ontario Human Rights Commission*
- Canadian Human Rights Act
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action

TEMPLATE FOR 'INTENT TO SMUDGE' NOTICE

See below.

INTENT TO SMUDGE NOTICE

A SMUDGING CEREMONY will be taking place in this area today from:

[start time] to [end time]

Smudging is a ceremony practiced by many Indigenous peoples that involves the burning of one or more of the Sacred Medicines (tobacco, sage, cedar, sweetgrass) in order to purify a space and/or to release negative thoughts, emotions and energy. Some research has shown that Smudging reduces the levels of bacteria in a room. You may notice a slight scent or a small plume of smoke during this time. This is to be expected when Sacred Medicines are lit.

McMaster University affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples to participate in Smudging. This right is upheld by the University's "*Procedure for Burning Traditional and Sacred Medicines*" which recognizes that "the use of these Traditional and Sacred Medicines for ceremonial purposes is separate and distinct from the 'recreational' use of tobacco, and other substances, and as such is not subject to the same restrictions outlined in the "*Smoke Free Campus Policy*".

With gratitude to members of the Indigenous Education Council, Indigenous Studies Program and Indigenous Student Services for their guidance.

Thank you, also, to members of the Indigenous community, on and off campus, who attended the various focus groups facilitated by Katelyn Knott, Indigenous Projects Facilitator, and who offered their invaluable insights and support.

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