

THE BYSTANDER



The Scent of Air Pollution

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It started with shampoos, soaps and lotions, air fresheners and laundry products. It's now an onslaught of scents added to trash bags, Kleenex, vacuum cleaners and even HVAC filters. Very few of these compounds are found in nature; they are petrochemicals synthesized by chemists to duplicate smells recognizable to the human olfactory nerve, often by mimicking food aromas. The Federal Fair Packaging and Labeling Act of 1973 doesn't require fragrance ingredients to be listed on products, so we don't even know what they are or what their gasses might do to us.

Perusing the aisles of our grocery stores, you'll find *Orange Pineapple Smoothie* shower gel next to the *Limited-Edition Sugar Cookie Shampoo*. If your *Honeysuckle* conditioner is nearly gone, add in some *Tropical Coconut*. Dry off with towels soaked in *Coral Blast* laundry detergent and then cycled through the dryer with *Amber Blossom* fabric softener. *Rose & Chamomile* lotion can be massaged onto feet after using *Verbena & Lavender* exfoliating beads. Keep your hair in place with *Candy Gumdrop* hair spray, and try this blend of nail polish; *Sunlit Grass* for the left hand and *April Fresh Blossom* for the right. Finish up with lipstick infused with *Wild Plum* and dab off the excess with a square of toilet paper marinated with *Cashmere Peach*.

A man can groom his goatee with *Tea Tree and Peppermint Beard Wash* and comb it down with *Stagecoach Scent Beard Oil*. Take *Dude Face Wipes with Energizing and Refreshing Scent* if you're on the road. At home, shower with *Shea-Butter Bay-Rum Soap* before rolling on *Old Spice Mountain Spring* deodorant. For the house, you can buy Febreze-infused vacuum cleaner bags, and dust-cloths steeped with *Lemon Citrus*. After dinner, clean your china with *Tomato and Pomegranate Coconut* dish soap, and add *Green Apple Rinse Agent* to the dishwasher. Leftovers can be scraped into a *Clean Burst Baby-Powder* aromatically-treated garbage bag.

Spruce up your car with *Hawaiian Aloha* for the upholstery, and *Italian Leather* for the dashboard and steering wheel. Take Fido to the pet spa for

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a *Pumpkin Chai Cherry Blossom* dog shampoo; change the kitty litter box with *Fresh Rose Blend*. If you miss the whiff of cedar on your artificial Christmas tree, buy some pine-scented ornaments. And when your Glade night light burns out, replace it with the new *Botanical Mist* spritzing model.

Thanks to all these products, we can no longer shop without bringing home something that smells like something it isn't. I'd like to buy things with no smell, or things that just smell like themselves. But what I come home with is usually contaminated by fragrance, since the unscented products are shipped to retailers in the same crates as the scented versions, then stocked on shelves right next to each other. Saddest of all, since the meat section is upwind of the cleaning products, I end up with bacon that has *Blue Iris Bliss* embedded in its plastic wrapper. And if I linger too long in Aisle 9 looking for the *Free & Clear* detergent, I come home reeking of *Spring Meadow Laundry Pods*.

The question is, why would anyone bother to purchase perfume in this age of odorized everything? That seems as pointless as buying a pop-up book for a Kindle. No one will be able to detect your \$50 per ounce fragrance amid the dozens of artificially scented items in the typical home, unless you spray it on so thick that it becomes the most aggressive odor in the room. And if you smoke cigarettes, it's likely that your sense of smell has been obliterated from tobacco. People who are allergic or sensitive to these chemicals have to deal with the nausea, headaches, sneezing or wheezing.

If your sense of smell isn't very good, or if you love the aromas, perhaps it doesn't bother you that our world is being polluted with the miasma of thousands of fake scents, many of which contain substances that are cited on the EPA's hazardous waste list.

But what bothers the rest of us is that we have to inhale your cloud of vapor everywhere we go, whether we like it or not.