



My Story

My name is Alyce Vincent. I suffer from Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, also known as Environmental Sensitivities. I react to most products that have been scented, as well as household and industrial products. My reactions include headaches, contact dermatitis, reactive lungs (asthma), and vocal cord dysfunction. I also experience nausea, loss of concentration, reduced ability to focus, brain fog, sudden fatigue, muscle weakness and aches. Some of those symptoms have medications that can to a degree, reduce the symptoms. The damage worsens with exposures. My condition is worse since working at Nordia.

I am sharing a small portion of my life story because this is an example of the type of experiences that people with M.C.S. encounter all the time. Research shows that about 12% of suffers actually lose their job as a result of this illness. I, like many sufferers, have lost several!

I wish no parties involved ill will, and seek only to make the public and employers aware of how often this type of scenario occurs, and encourage other sufferers to speak out and tell their story.

I have redacted the names of other agents and the union employees involved, but management's first names remain for clarity.

My case went to Ontario Human Rights Tribunal, and just minutes before the hearing began, lawyers for both sides were able to negotiate a settlement that is to remain confidential.

In early November 2012, I applied for a position at Nordia Inc. This is a call center that provides customer service to customers with Bell cell phones, T.V, and some internet products and services. The position I applied for was a customer service agent for the mobility portion of the business.

I was quickly called in for interviews. The first was with Sanderson (HR Hiring), and it went very well. The same day I also met with Mario, a Team Manager (a supervisor). I was very clear with both of them about my condition, telling them that I had isocyanate sensitization...which in layman's terms was like bad allergies. I advised both men that I was allergic to chemicals, such as **perfumes, colognes, aftershaves, deodorants, scented shampoos/crème rinses, hand and body lotions, as well as things like cleaning chemicals, air fresheners, candles, etc.** I am very careful to cover these categories, since they are the most representative of what I will most likely encounter in a public setting. I advise them that it is an actual **disability** for me, and what types of reactions I have when in contact with irritants. They say they claim to be fragrance free and equal opportunity employers. I was told nobody wears scented products, and they even clean with vinegar. I am hired, and start training on the 20th of November, 2012. I am ecstatic!

I arrived for training and all is going well, there are some people in my training class of 18-20 who are wearing products, but the trainer Darryl advises them of the policy along with other policies. I do experience vocal

difficulty and get a headache, but I am encouraged by the policy and confident that it will get better, and for a few days, it does.

A few days into training, it becomes apparent that people are wearing products. I mention this to my trainer Darryl. He advises me he will speak to the Team Managers and see what he can do. As the days go by, it becomes **very** obvious that **the policy is not followed at all**. In my training class, some people are now wearing scented body products, and my system is beginning to react to these irritants. Amongst us trainees, it becomes a topic of discussion, with the class fairly evenly divided on my rights. One young woman even told me **I should go live in a bubble if I couldn't deal with it**. I gently tried to inform them about human rights and disabilities, that we all have the right to earn a living. It didn't change most of their opinions. In training we are advised of special accommodations seating for those with disabilities. About halfway through training, I requested seating accommodations, away from others in a scent free area. Darryl made this request to the HR Manager Marc. I was told I would need a current doctor's note. I advised them (both Darryl and my newly assigned TM Steve) that I did not have a family doctor, but could provide proof that I did have a recognized disability, and did have a letter from WSIB outlining my disability and to avoid exposure to irritants.

I was told that it needs to be a current doctor's note. I advised my new Team Leader Steve that I was trying to get to a specialist for a more updated assessment. I was advised that they would accommodate my disability when I was able to provide current proof of my disability. This occurred at the time when I was just being handed off from trainer to Team Leader, so both were aware of the situation, along with Marc in HR.

My newly assigned Team Manger was Steve. At one of our initial meetings in January, we discussed my disability. I shared with him my concerns, and how in a previous job, people had hidden things to see if I would react, and how they let me search an office for about 30 minutes before I found Lysol wipes in a ziplock bag, hidden in a desk drawer (which was what I was reacting to). Steve knew how concerned I was and that I was afraid of my disability becoming an issue there, and losing my job. He reassured me that they would not let me go because of my disability and I should tell him or any of the managers if someone is wearing some sort of scented product that is causing me any issues. He also advised me that he would speak to HR and have them remind everyone of the policy. As word gets around about my condition, a good portion of the agents are sensitive to my situation, and begin to be more careful, more so the older agents it seems. Some of the younger agents are not so concerned or sensitive, and carry on wearing products, as did some of the Team Managers, even one who claimed to be allergic to perfumes.

I am shocked to realize that the Team Managers are among the worst offenders, especially the women managers who have scented hand lotions at their desks, and often share these with agents on the floor. "Floorwalkers" were assigned to assist us with customers while we were in training, they quickly became aware of my disability, and late in A-bay (early to mid January), one of the floorwalkers came up to assist me with a

call. She was wearing a significant amount of perfume, and as soon as it hit me, my vocal cords reacted, and my voice quickly went from normal to sounding like Marge Simpson...to gone completely.

I told my Team Manager Steve. He never (to my knowledge) asked to speak to the young lady, or even looked into the issue.

In around mid January 2013, the situation was not really getting much better, I emailed Steve and advised him that I would like to assist the company in setting up a method of both educating the staff, as well as enforcing the policy, my offer was politely declined.

I asked Steve who handles this policy? Who do I need to talk to about getting it enforced? He told me the Health and Safety Committee would probably be the ones to speak to. When I asked one of the ladies that was part of the committee she informed me that they don't handle this as it is a policy and as such is handled by the company.

It also is not covered under the union contract so any attempts to get their help have been very limited. At both the health and safety committee and the union levels, my position was understood and agreed with, but I was told that although others had tried, the company would not enforce the policy. When I asked what good was the policy if they didn't enforce it, I was repeatedly told by management that it was more of a request, and they could not/would not enforce it. Some of the reasons given to me were that it was **too expensive** and not practical for them to make the changes required by law to meet a "fragrance free" designation (according to government criteria), they felt it was too expensive to insist staff buy scent free deodorant, etc. **The staff had a right to wear what they wanted.** These comments were told to me more than once by a few of the TM's. On more than one occasion, **I was also told that I might have to make a choice (between my disability and my job),** by my supervisor Steve.

After a few times of mentioning offenders to my supervisors I was told by my TM Steve, very pointedly that I needed to **be careful to make friends not enemies**, since I was still new there.

Steve and virtually all of the Team Managers told me that there was nothing that they could do, **they couldn't force people not to wear perfumes/colognes etc.** I let them know that I had a recognised disability, and that health concerns will almost always supersede most other concerns. To my knowledge not a single person was ever sent home or reprimanded beyond being asked to move (I was often told to move).

This was the case on a shift that I worked on Friday Jan 4th, 2013. I had 3 separate reactions during that shift and told the TM She spoke with the girl, but did not reprimand her or send her home.

On Feb 6, 2013 I again experienced reactions (vocal cord dysfunction/loss of voice) that sent me home. It was not unusual for me to put myself in "downtime" (unable to take calls), as I was told to do while moving from one station to another in attempt to move away from the scented offender. I spoke to both Patrick (TM), and Jen (TM). Jen and I agreed that I would not be able to continue to work, as my voice was not returning. I told

Jen that I didn't think it was right that I had to lose hours and pay because someone else was not following the policies. She told me that there was nothing she could do, and leaving would count against me (she meant as a sick day). I had no choice as my throat was in pain and I had no voice to speak off.

During my entire 3 month probation period, things continued this way, but because **I desperately needed the job (and they knew it)**, I tried to make as few waves as possible, trying to carefully choose where I sat, attempting to surround myself with people that I knew were trying to be sensitive to my situation. I considered sitting in the area that had the higher walls, but it was a small area, and if fragrance got into that area, it harder for air flow to move it out. The couple of times I did attempt to sit over there but it didn't seem to help, as it was not fragrance free either. My Team Leader Steve had mentioned this as a possible option for me, but I advised him that there were people over there that wore perfume, and that when something did get in the area, there was no easy way for it to dissipate as the airflow was significantly more reduced due to the higher partitions. This was prior to my incident with Mario in March, 2013.

My Team Manager (Steve) was letting me know, that I was getting closer to my expected targets, (as long as the topic wasn't my reactions, he was reasonably nice), that I was a good employee and could be the best on the floor in time, and that I was friendly and helpful to customers. I was a good employee (other than my disability). At the end of the probation period, I was hired on, and had just officially moved from part time to full time status. The general consensus was if you lasted 6 months, you would be a lifer, I was actively employed for 8 months. Only 3 of the 18 of us that started were still there at the 6 month mark.

Things really became difficult in late March, 2013.

On Saturday, March 23, 2013 I went into work a day shift. Very few agents were in yet. I was on the phone when TM Mario walked by me. I was immediately thrown into a reaction by something he was wearing. Over the next several minutes he passed by me a couple more times, making it even more difficult for me to talk. It was clear that it was him as there was nobody else around, but I was on calls and unable to speak to him just yet. Shortly thereafter two other agents I know started their shifts and sat beside me. To my right was agent *****, and kitty-corner to me was *****, both senior agents and sensitive to my condition.

Since I continued to have difficulty with my voice, ***** and ***** called Mario over to tell him that I was having a reaction to his fragrance (I was struggling on a call at the time). He listened to them (and me), and I could see him smiling, and nodding as he is listening to my hoarse voice, then he casually walked away. ***** turned to me after my call ended and stated that he didn't think that Mario believed him. When I asked why he thought that, both he and ***** indicated that he (Mario) was **smiling** about it. After trying to struggle through calls and only making my throat more painful, I finally decided that maybe a bit of a break for my voice might work. I put myself in downtime at 2:03pm, and notified Mario via e-mail.

By this time I was somewhat in pain, and was waiting to discuss with him how best to proceed. He never

responded to my email. At 2:27pm I sent him a second email advising him that I had again tried to take calls, and been unable to continue. I asked him point blank what he wanted me to do. I did not get a response. I could see he was at his desk, about 12-15 ft away from me, in clear line of sight. I went for my half hour lunch break, thinking that surely by then he would have responded. He did not respond. I was unsure how to proceed at this point. My voice is no better, and I am certain he has seen my emails, as he is normally quick to respond to agents.

He was assisting another agent a few rows away, so I went to stand over there to wait for him to finish assisting her. When he did finally come over to me, he was grinning. I told him (with great difficulty, my voice is a very hoarse whisper) that I was unable to speak as a result of people wearing scented products in the call center. He stared straight at me and told me to “just say it”, who was it. It was clear to me **he was taunting and challenging me**. I hesitated and he insisted. I told him it was him. Still grinning he asked if I was going home sick. I told him that I didn't feel that **I should have to leave work and lose hours because people were not following the policy**. He told me that the company could not be expected to pay me for not working because of my disability. I told him that if I wasn't paid for it I would launch a grievance with the union. At this point he became very upset with me, telling me that he wasn't wearing cologne, he was openly yelling at me on the call center floor, and had moved quite close to me. I told him he was a supervisor he should know better than to wear anything scented. People were staring, most people on the floor **could hear and see him yelling at me**. I was getting hurt and distraught and began crying. I was becoming more and more overwhelmed by his fragrance and his actions, and tried to move away from him, he pursued me down the row several feet, and when he caught up with me I turned back the other way and started moving a few feet away from him again. He continued to pursue me. Finally I turned at him and told him to stay back, he was making me sicker. He told me to go stand by my desk and he went off to get a union rep. I did as he instructed. While waiting back at my desk, he suddenly and quickly came around the corner and walked right up to me so close that I had to step back. He was only inches from my face and he demanded to know **“are you accusing me of something”** I was actually quite afraid of him, he was trying hard to intimidate me and make me back down. He repeated his question. I told him that I was reacting to something that he was wearing. He told me to go to wait in the sick room. I did.

Within a few minutes he came back with a union rep (*****) and I told her my side of the story. Mario sat next to her in a chair **leaning back, arms crossed, one leg draped over the other and grinning**. I got more and more upset beginning to cry again at his cruel reaction to both my physical and emotion distress. Finally I told him to quit grinning, why was he grinning, it wasn't funny. The smile disappeared. He again said he wasn't wearing anything, he asked the union rep if she could smell anything, she indicated that yes, she too could smell his fragrance. We determined that it was probably his scented antiperspirant/deodorant. I believe it was something like “ocean breeze” **He insisted that it was not a perfume and thereby didn't follow under the policy**. I educated him that a **fragrance free policy covered all scented products...not just perfumes**. He had worn it before and when he again (I had heard this from management in the past) told me that another person had worked here before me that was even more sensitive than I was, I looked directly at him and asked “then what are we doing here?” **If they had previously had an employee who was even more sensitive than I am, they should know exactly how they should be behaving.**

When I asked Mario what had happened to that other employee, he advised me that he had quit.

After agreeing that there was no way that I could continue working that day, ***** the union rep advised Mario that if I was not paid for that day, the union would fight it. He agreed that I would be paid, and I left work.

The following days I was nervous at work, always on edge and anxious. I never heard if any repercussions followed the incident, no discipline for Mario's behavior, no step up in enforcing the policy, no noticeable changes.

The following week, on Good Friday, Mar 29, 2013, I was working a day shift, there were fewer staff than usual, and I was seated in a section that was fairly empty. A young woman walked by me roughly 10 ft away and instantly my vocal cords reacted and my voice was gone. This is painful to my throat. I also developed a headache immediately. My throat is still tender from the encounter the previous week with Mario.

When I tell the Team Leader on duty (Shelly), she indicates that **if I can't work, then I should log out sick and go home. I told her that I didn't think it was fair that I should have to continue to lose hours because other people are not following company policy**. I request a union person to assist me with the concern. The union rep on duty comes over and it is agreed that I should go for medical attention in order to get paid. The hospital appears to be the only option at that time, as it is a holiday.

Since it is a hospital, and I am not suffering an immediately “life threatening” injury, I will have a long wait. I advise both the union rep, and Shelly that the doctor will not likely be able to help me for several reasons (based on past experience) 1) by the time they see me, there is a good chance that the majority of the reaction will have dissipated, which meant that they couldn't treat it, or even scope my throat to confirm it 2) Most doctors are not familiar with my condition and therefore are not likely to give a major diagnosis on something they have no familiarity with, especially when future treatment is in place in the coming weeks with other specialists, 3) there is no immediate treatment available to counter the reaction.

I left and went to the Hospital, where I was for several hours. I was paid for my entire shift, but no other action was taken to my knowledge.

Around April 1, 2013 when my supervisor returned from his vacation, and I updated him on what had happened, he commented that that was certainly not very appropriate behavior for a supervisor, then he told me to go sit over in the area with the high walls from now on. It meant I would be at most 12 ft away from Mario, who would have to pass by me quite often.

On that same day (a little before 6 pm) I had another reaction to an agent shortly after he sat down behind me. I didn't even know someone was there until I started to lose my voice and my throat became sore. I looked around me for the source and found him behind me, across the aisle. He was wearing a heavily scented product.

The next shift that myself and Mario worked, which I believe was in early April as my TM Steve had not yet sent me to the cubicles, Mario came over to stand directly across from me and chatted to the young lady there for a

few minutes until my voice cracked in reaction to his fragrance, at which point he left.

After I was sent over to the tall cubicles, I was sitting as far away from Mario as I could get, next to Shelly's cubicle (another TM). Mario came over and visited with Shelly over the top of the glass, raising his arms to rest them on the glass only a couple of feet from me, he would stay for several minutes then leave. By raising his arms up to the top of the glass, it exposed his underarms to the airflow, and it was only a matter of time until his ocean breeze deodorant made its way to me. **This appeared to me to be a very intentional act!** He did this 3 times within about an hour, until my voice gave away, then he went and sat on the chair in her cubicle.

For quite some time (months) after my encounter with Mario, if I needed a supervisors assistance/approval, and if I had to contact him, he would either ignore my calls, or pick up the phone and hang it right back up, forcing me to seek him out personally (as no other TM was available), and then often times he would not be co-operative with me, giving me vague answers or just shrugging his shoulders at me in response to my questions.

He also twice in one afternoon took a very extended route past me to his destination, I feel that this also was a deliberate attempt to harass me by attempting to cause a reaction, and **wear me down to the point where I just quit.**

I had several ongoing exposures in the tall cubicles, including from Shelly's (TM) hand lotion, which was scented, a brown Vaseline bottle (coco butter I think), as well as other agents, and supervisors. Often times I would have to log off my computer and log back on in after moving from one spot to another in the call center away from someone who was scented. Some shifts I was forced to move several times.

I became nervous and anxious. I began to lose hair, I was crying a lot, I didn't know what to do. I couldn't do anything until I saw the specialists and got a more updated confirmation of my diagnosis.

During the time between my encounter with Mario and when my doctor finally pulled me off work in July there were multiple more incidents of my reacting, it became a daily thing for me to lose my voice. It was not unusual for me to have tears going down my cheeks from pain while on a call, which supervisors did see. My supervisor Steve began openly yelled at me and belittled me, once he yelled at me because I forgot my new password, when I told him it had changed, he basically called me a liar in front of several other agents, telling me that it never changed and was the same one that was issued to me in training. He was telling me I had better get myself together as he didn't have time to deal with my passwords all the time. I was crying heavily, and openly by the time that I was able to locate my list of the changed passwords that I had indeed gone through in the past couple of months. Numerous other agents around me heard and saw this exchange and **I was once again humiliated and embarrassed.** These types of incidents only began after my encounter with Mario, and I felt like I was being pushed to the point where I would quit my job.

At one point another worker was very concerned about a reaction I was having to somebody scented products, he went and closed the door of the girl wearing the fragrance (green apple), and when he tried to advise Mario's of my condition, he was waved off. I don't know what Mario said, but the conversation lasted less than 5 seconds, and Mario went on his way and the other worker came back to check on me.

I was warned by my TM Steve about my attendance since having to leave work was counted as a sick day. I

was told that I had already missed my allowed amount for the entire year. I was told that any more missed time was going to result in more serious reprimands. I never left work as a result of a reaction again, only using the occasional early leave time ("call time" I think it was called).

I was also pushed about hitting my goals/targets by my TM Steve. These target goals were also suffering as a result of both my lost time at work and my stress levels. There were often days when my voice didn't return to normal between shifts, and the overall reactions became longer and more painful. The union couldn't help me because it was not part of the contract, the health and safety committee insisted it was the company's policy to enforce and they had no authority in the matter.

When I finally got to see the ENT (Ear/Nose/Throat) specialist July 18 2013, she immediately indicated that **I had to be in a fragrance free environment, and that it must be strictly enforced.** I took that note to my TM Steve that same day. He read it, and told me that "I guess you have some decisions to make" (he had told me this before, so I knew what he meant). When I asked him what kind of decisions, he told me regarding my job future with the company. When I asked what he meant, he said **"you need to decide if you are going to just accept things here, or find a new job"** I asked about special seating accommodations (which is what they had been telling me they needed the updated medical for), he advised me that they had tried the tall cubicles and that had not worked, so there was nothing else they could do. I told him that they needed to be able to enforce the policy.

He said he would speak to Human Resources about it, and he went to the HR office. That was on the Friday afternoon. I never heard anything more about it. By the following week when nothing had happened, I went to the clinic and advised them of the situation. They pulled me from work.

While the company did send out policy reminders (eating/dress code and fragrance, all lumped into one email) about once a quarter, at the end of the fragrance portion, it virtually contradicts itself, here is the fragrance portion of that policy reminder. This is the reminder, not the policy.

Fragrance Sensitivity – But We All Still Need To Shower And Bathe

Several employees are sensitive to fragrances and have strong reactions to them when they come in contact with someone that has used a product that is heavily scented. **Please refrain from using products that are highly scented prior to coming to work or during your workday.**

Having said that, it goes without saying that all employees must follow proper personal hygiene and ensure they shower, bathe and come to work in clean clothes which lead me to...

It is worth noting that none of these policies (food at desk, dress code, or fragrance free), are adhered to, even by management.

By the end of July 2013, my self esteem was so low, my hairline had re-ceeded almost a full cm in just a few

months, and my hair was thinning significantly. Hundreds of strands of strands of hair would come out at a time while combing my hair or shampooing it. I couldn't sleep very well and my throat was in constant pain. I was crying both at home and sometimes while working because of the painful physical strain my voice was under, and the stress of knowing that losing this job could cost me any form of stability and security, and it did

On July 25, 2013, when I went to Marc's office to tell him that the doctors were pulling me off work, I enquired about my vacation pay. He told me that they don't give it out until the end of the year. Over the next few months until I quit in Dec, 2013 I was told different dates that I could get my vacation pay, eventually they decided I could receive it in April of the following year (2014).

On December 14, 2013, having decided that there was no way that Nordia was going to accommodate my disability, with no more hope of returning and without any means of financial income, I officially quit my job, which was the only other way to get my vacation pay. There was a small but distinct grin on Marc's face when I told him why I was there.

On one of my visits there, I think it was Nov 9, 2013, to get some paperwork, I was informed by one of the union ladies that another girl had had a **violent vomiting type reaction to someone who was wearing Axe products**, just the day before. She and another union rep had advised me multiple times over the course of my employment there, that they had tried over the years, but could not get the company to enforce the policy.

Nordia's position was to deny what they could. What they couldn't deny, mostly due to witnesses, they blamed on my not providing them with sufficient information to protect me, and ultimately they attacked the validity of my disability, which is recognized government wide.