

## What is smudging?

Smudging is a spiritual and cultural practice observed by many Indigenous Peoples, particularly among First Nations and Métis communities. It involves the burning of one or more sacred medicines—commonly tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and/or cedar. The smoke produced is used for cleansing purposes, such as purifying a person, a space, or a group, and is often part of ceremonies or personal reflection.

## Respectful Participation:

If you are invited to participate in a smudge, it is appropriate to do so with respect. You are welcome to quietly observe, and it's okay to ask questions if you are unsure about something, as there are different teachings. Participation is always voluntary.

This guide was created to answer frequently asked questions about smudging.

### Campus Contacts:

indigenousinitiatives@uwo.ca  
firesafety@uwo.ca  
accessibility@uwo.ca

### References:

Canadian Encyclopedia (2018)  
Smudging, Web.

Indigenous Inclusion Directorate:  
Manitoba Education & Training (2018)  
Smudging Protocol & Guidelines for  
School Divisions

Kechego, Betsy Waawaaskone.  
Deshkaan Ziibiing. Lives in Chippewas  
of the Thames First Nation. Oral  
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Kiiskeentum (n.d.) Gifts from the  
Creator for man's use...The smudging  
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Mohagheghzadeh, A. et al. (2006)  
Medicinal Smokes. Journal of  
Ethnopharmacology. 108 (2) 161-184.



## Western University Procedure for Burning Traditional Medicines on Campus



## Why do Indigenous Peoples smudge?

Smudging helps Indigenous people ground themselves and stay connected to their teachings, communities, and the land. While teachings vary from Nation to Nation, smudging is generally understood as a way to cleanse the air around us and to bring balance to our whole being. As we smudge, we may focus on cleansing:

- Our minds, so we have good thoughts
- Our eyes, so we see the good in others
- Our ears, so we hear only good things about others
- Our mouths, so we speak kindly and respectfully
- Our whole being, so we act in ways that reflect the best parts of ourselves

If you have more questions about smudging or pipe ceremonies, please contact the Office of Indigenous Initiatives or speak with a Knowledge Keeper or Elder.

## When might an Indigenous community member smudge?

- In accordance with their teachings, customs, and ceremonies
- Before a gathering or important conversation
- As a personal wellness or self-care practice, including by students, faculty, or staff

## Did you know?

Smudging is generally not considered a religious practice among Indigenous Peoples. Instead, it is viewed as part of living a holistic and balanced way of life.

Colonization significantly impacted Indigenous customs and practices. For example, until the 1950s, the Indian Act outlawed smudging and other ceremonies such as the Potlatch and Sundance.



## Campus Procedures for Smudging

**“Smudge-friendly” locations do not require advance permission to smudge. These designated spaces include:**

- Indigenous Student Centre – WSSB 2100
- Indigenous Studies – SSC 3207
- Indigenous Education – FEB 1092
- Indigenous Student Space – HSA 43
- Kresge Prayer Room, KB 7
- Wampum Learning Lodge

**To use a non-designated space for smudging:**

1. Email [indigenoussmudge@uwo.ca](mailto:indigenoussmudge@uwo.ca) at least one week in advance, including:
  - Organizer’s full name and contact information
  - Department, building and room location
  - Date, including start and end time
2. Post signage at least one day prior to the event, indicating that a smudge ceremony will take place.
3. Familiarize yourself with the nearest fire extinguisher, exit, and alarm-pull station.
4. Use a proper container for burning the smudge (e.g., abalone shell, stone bowl, copper, brass, or cast-iron pan).
5. Be prepared to open a window and/or close a door, depending on ventilation.

## Relevant & Related Legislation

*Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Constitution Act (1982)*

*Canadian Human Rights Act (1985)*

*Ontario Human Rights Code*

*Preventing Discrimination Based on Creed (2015)*

*Smoke-Free Policy, Western University (2019)*

*Tobacco Control Act (1994)*

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report (2015)*

*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)*