

VOCs From Aromatherapy

By: Steve Froelicher Ph.D.

Senior Chemist at Prism Analytical Technologies, Inc.

February 2015

According to the National Association of Holistic Aromatherapy (<https://www.naha.org/>), aromatherapy is the art and science of utilizing naturally extracted aromatic essences from plants (i.e., essential oils) to balance, harmonize and promote the health of body, mind and spirit. The oils can be applied topically to various skin locations, but are more commonly inhaled through the use of reed diffusers.

Lavender is a popular essential oil that is composed primarily of linalool (CAS 78-70-6) and linalyl acetate (CAS 115-95-7). However, more than twenty other ingredients, including myrcene, alpha-pinene, beta-pinene, camphene, eucalyptol, and camphor are found in lavender. The latter VOCs are commonly found to be present in indoor air. The source of these VOCs can be from other consumer products as well, such as cleaning products, perfumes, and air fresheners.

Aromatherapy practitioners must be cautious with the use of their products. Exposure to aromatherapy essential oils is recommended for only 15-60 min intervals. Beyond this time, the VOCs released may begin to have detrimental effects on people present in the indoor environment. In addition, essential oils are not regulated by the FDA so various concoctions found in health stores may not be pure essential oils and may contain ingredients that produce VOCs that could be detrimental to health. Finally, pets can be affected by the use of essential oils in the home. Cats are especially at risk as the cat's liver does not have the ability to metabolize and detoxify many substances.