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# ALASKA LEGISLATURE

## Committees

JUDICIARY  
LABOR & COMMERCE  
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE  
ADMINISTRATION



JUNEAU

BOX V  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811  
(907) 465-2647

ANCHORAGE

BOX 10-1776  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99510  
(907) 562-1776

**Kevin "Pat" Parnell**  
Representative  
University-Midtown, Anchorage

## SPONSOR STATEMENT for HB 499

I have introduced HB 499, "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors," because of the increasing need for action in the area of inhalants, and continuing abuse thereof.

When people think about inhaling a toxic vapor, there is a need to understand the dangers of this action. As recently as one month ago, a 12-year-old boy in Nome died from sniffing gasoline with his two friends. This was followed by three men, who died sniffing laughing gas in Los Angeles, California.

Inhaling toxic vapors is an ever-increasing problem in the United States. It is more prevalent in Alaska. According to the Alaska Council on the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Alaska ranks 10% higher in percentage of high school seniors who have used inhalants.

HB 499 addresses the act of inhaling itself, because most toxic vapors used are legal. The bill does not handle the the problem of inhaling toxic vapors, which can only be dealt with by education, and that requires funding.

I would like to believe that HB 499 can be useful to help stop people from doing this.

*Sponsor Statement*

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## SECTIONAL ANALYSIS for HB 499

Section 1 amends AS 11.76 by adding a new section.

AS 11.76.150(a) states that a person may not knowingly inhale the fumes of toxic vapors for the purpose of causing a condition of euphoria, excitement, exhilaration, or dulled senses of the nervous system.

It states that this act does not apply to inhalation of anesthesia or other substances for medical or dental purposes.

(b) ingredients of the inhalant are listed in (c).

(c) toxic vapors are listed.

(d) states that the person who violates (a) is punishable under AS 12.55, and the fine may not be more than \$100.

*sectional analysis*

Testimony on House Bill 499  
April 2, 1992

Sara Gray, Student Assistance Counselor,  
Ronalda Cadiante, Assistant Principal/Counselor  
Marie Drake Middle School

We support House Bill No. 499 because we believe that it will strengthen our effort in working with youth alcohol and drug prevention. Most Elementary and Middle School children respect the law. We believe the fact there is no current legal ramifications to using inhalants minimizes their danger in the child's mind. This bill would provide a clear message to children that to use inhalants as a mind altering substance will result in serious consequences.

This bill also sends a message that we, as adults, have the responsibility of protecting our youth. This includes saving them from themselves, if necessary. Toxic vapors are quickly addicting and so severely damaging to users, that prevention must be our first goal. This bill represents a prevention approach which is even more critical when we realize treatment is lengthy, costly, and generally ineffective.

We must also be cognizant of the fact that since most products used are readily available. It would be impossible to prohibit access to the numerous substances. This makes prevention efforts the most effective tool to rely upon.

Marie Drake Middle School has a population of 510 students. During this year alone we have worked with 12 students who have been identified as inhalant users. These students have identified others in their peer group who have participated with them in using inhalants. We do not have the means to project actual numbers, since we must rely on self or peer reporting, but what we are seeing is that inhalant use is perpetuated by peer influence. One person introduces the activity, and others follow.

We would like to share with you how inhalant users impact our school by providing a profile of these students. Inhalant use crosses all socio-economic, gender, and racial boundaries. [We are beginning to identify similarities in behavior.] Generally, the student displays a wandering behavior, skipping class, low performance in the classroom, little or no motivation. In more extreme cases, the

student begins skipping school, running away from home, high absenteeism, low academic performance, mood swings, depression, defiance, and ambivalence are the most pronounced signs. In both examples, parents are unable to carry any parental role with their child. Their authority is no longer recognized by their child, since the addiction is controlling. Unfortunately, the only apparant way these students receive assistance, is when they break the law and become part of the social services system. We have witnessed this time and time again.

We believe this bill will assist us in our prevention efforts. It is a dangerous substance, causing quick addiction and potential irreparable harm.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title: "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors."  
 Sponsor: Representative Parnell  
 Requestor: House HESS Committee

Department Affected: Department of Law  
 BRU: Prosecution  
 Component: All

COMPONENT SERIAL 

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Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

84 through 91

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

CAPITAL						
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REVENUE FUND SOURCE:						
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER FUND SOURCE:						
TOTAL						

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

Estimate of current year impact: \_\_\_\_\_

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)

Please see the attached analysis.

Prepared by: Richard I. Pegues, Director  
 Division: Administrative Services  
 Approved by Commissioner: Charles E. Cole, Attorney General  
 Agency: Department of Law

Phone: 465-3672  
 Date: March 27, 1992  
 Date: March 27, 1992

Distribution (by preparer): Leg. Fin., Legislative Sponsor, Requestor, OMB/DBR, Gov. Legis. Ofc., & Impacted Agency(ies).

*FN & LAW*

# CONTINUATION of FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS

For Bill/Resolution No. HB 499

This bill adds a new section to AS 11.76 to make it a violation for a person to knowingly smell or inhale the fumes of certain specified toxic vapors for the purpose of causing a condition of euphoria, excitement, exhilaration, stupefaction, or dulled senses of the nervous system. A person who violates these provisions commits the offense of abusing toxic vapors, which would be punishable as a violation, except that if a fine is imposed it may not be more than \$100. We do not anticipate many adult violators where the prosecution would face much of a defense, because a person who commits a minor offense such as this does not have a right to a jury trial or a publically-provided defense. In most cases, offenders are simply going to pay the fine. Establishing this offense may also allow state social workers to intervene in cases where minors are committing this offense, under the state's child-in-need-of-aid laws.

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Affected: Administration

Title: An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors

BRU: Office of Public Advocacy

Component: Office of Public Advocacy

Sponsor: Parnell

Requestor: House Health, Education and Social Services

COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 

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Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES	0	0	0	0	0	0
TRAVEL	0	0	0	0	0	0
CONTRACTUAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUPPLIES	0	0	0	0	0	0
EQUIPMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0
LAND & STRUCTURES	0	0	0	0	0	0
GRANTS, CLAIMS	0	0	0	0	0	0
MISCELLANEOUS	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

CAPITAL	0	0	0	0	0	0
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REVENUE FUND SOURCE:	0	0	0	0	0	0
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	0	0	0	0	0	0
FEDERAL FUNDS	0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHER FUND SOURCE:	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
PART-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
TEMPORARY	0	0	0	0	0	0

Estimate of current year impact: None

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)

Because the penalties for violation for this new statute do not call for incarceration or loss of a valuable license, attorneys will not be appointed at public expense to represent defendants.

Prepared by: Brant McGee, Public Advocate

Phone: 274-1684

Division: Office of Public Advocacy

Date: February 28, 1992

Approved by Commissioner: Nancy Bear Usera

Date: 3/27/92

Agency: Administration

Distribution (by preparer): Leg. Fin., Legislative Sponsor, Requestor, OMB/DBR, Gov. Legis. Ofc., & Impacted Agency(ies).

*Public Advocacy  
FN & Administration*

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Title: "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors."

Department Affected: Administration  
BRU: Public Defender Agency  
Component: Public Defender Agency

Sponsor: Parnell  
Requestor: House Health, Education and Social Services

COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 

1	6	3	1
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Expenditures/Revenues: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES	.	.	.	.	.	.
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	.	.	.	.	.	.

CAPITAL	.	.	.	.	.	.
---------	---	---	---	---	---	---

REVENUE FUND SOURCE:	.	.	.	.	.	.
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FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	.	.	.	.	.	.
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER FUND SOURCE:						
<b>TOTAL</b>	.	.	.	.	.	.

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	.	.	.	.	.	.
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY	.	.	.	.	.	.

Estimate of current year impact: \_\_\_\_\_

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)  
  
(See attached)

Prepared by: John Salemi, Public Defender  
Division: Public Defender Agency

Phone: 279-7541  
Date: March 3, 1992

Approved by Commissioner: Nancy Bear Usera  
Agency: Administration

Date: 3/27/92

Distribution (by preparer): Leg. Fin., Legislative Sponsor, Requestor, OMB/DBR, Gov. Legis. Ofc., & Impacted Agency(ies).

*Public Defender*  
*FN \* Administration*

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

ANALYSIS: (continued)

TITLE: "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors."

This crime will be prosecuted as a violation when a person knowingly inhales any one of a number of substances listed in the statute for a "high." This statute is clearly enacted to deal with the growing problem of the youth of our State engaging in "glue sniffing" or "gas sniffing." For any adult prosecuted under this statute, the penalties are so low and do not include incarceration or the loss of a valuable license such that attorneys will not be appointed at State expense to represent adult defendants.

However, in those situations where a juvenile offender is to be charged, such a violation will subject the juvenile to the entire panoply of proceedings under the juvenile delinquency statutes including probable cause hearings, detention hearings and the possibility of commitment to McLaughlin Youth Center. While it is acknowledged that there is an extensive problem with regard to the abuse of toxic vapors, it is indeterminable how many of these cases will be prosecuted in the juvenile system as new crimes or as probation violations and what the resultant impact to the juvenile sections of the Public Defender Agency will be. However, any increase in the type of crimes that can be charged and used to begin juvenile proceedings or revoke juvenile probation will have definite fiscal impact

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Department Affected: Public Safety  
 Title: "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors." BRU: Alaska State Troopers  
 Component: Detachments  
 Sponsor: Representative Parnell  
 Requestor: House HESS COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 

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EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars) (inflation not included)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
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REVENUE FUND SOURCE:	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
----------------------	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND						
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER FUND SOURCE:						
<b>TOTAL</b>	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
PART-TIME	0	0	0	0	0	0
TEMPORARY	0	0	0	0	0	0

Estimate of current year impact: \_\_\_\_\_

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)  
 No fiscal impact is anticipated.

Prepared By: Francis C. Allan Phone: 269-5691  
 Division: Alaska State Troopers Date: 3/25/92  
 Approved by Commissioner: *Richard L. Burton* Richard L. Burton  
 Agency: Department of Public Safety Date: 3/26/92

*FN* *Public Safety*

FISCAL NOTE

STATE OF ALASKA  
1992 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 499

Revision Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Department Affected: Department of Corrections  
 Title: "An Act creating the offense of abusing toxic vapors." BRU: none  
 Component: none  
 Sponsor: Parnell  
 Requestor: House HFSS COMPONENT SERIAL NO. 

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EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96	FY 97	FY 98
PERSONAL SERVICES	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
TRAVEL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
CONTRACTUAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
SUPPLIES	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
EQUIPMENT	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
LAND & STRUCTURES	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
GRANTS, CLAIMS	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
MISCELLANEOUS	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

CAPITAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
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REVENUE						
FUND SOURCE:						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER FUND SOURCE:						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME						
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

Estimate of current year impact: 0

ANALYSIS: (Attach a separate page if necessary.)

This offense would be a violation, punishable by a fine rather than imprisonment or probation. Therefore, no impact is expected.

Prepared By: Diane Schenker, Legislative Liaison Phone: 465-3376  
 Division: Office of the Commissioner Date: 03/31/92  
 Approved by Commissioner: Lloyd Hames, Commissioner *Lloyd Hames*  
 Agency: Department of Corrections Date: 03/31/92

## ALCOHOL HIDDEN INGREDIENT IN NUMBER OF MEDICINES

She was prim and proper ... a real lady, polite and soft spoken. Her clothes weren't expensive, but she was neat and fashionable for a woman in her sixties.

The check-out clerk in the supermarket bagged her groceries, helped her out the door and turned to me with a bemused smile. "That's the second bottle of NyQuil this week," she said. "She's been buying the stuff like it's going out of style. Could her cold really last for four months?"

While it's entirely possible that this sweet, silver-haired lady had a persistent evening cough, it could also be that she was using this over-the-counter cold remedy as a nightcap.

NyQuil contains 25% alcohol (equal to 50 proof) combined with cough suppressant, decongestant, pain reliever and the antihistamine doxylamine. A nip of NyQuil could become a habit for some folks who, like our supermarket shopper, would probably never dream of drinking liquor.

Around the turn of the century, a lot of strait-laced ladies relied on Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, which was widely promoted for "women's problems." Many of these women disapproved quite strongly of drinking and would have been shocked to realize that their favorite tonic was stronger than wine.

Just last week, we learned of a foreman who sipped Listerine throughout the day. No doubt he would have been fired had he guzzled beer or whiskey so openly, but his boss was unaware the mouthwash was more than 25% alcohol.

Many popular liquid medications do contain substantial amounts of alcohol. Comtrex Liquid, for example, is 20% alcohol, nearly as much as NyQuil.

While this may not be dangerous in itself, if people take the cold remedy at the recommended dose for a limited time, it can pose a problem for those who must take prescription medicines that don't mix well with alcohol. They should beware of cough syrups such as terpin hydrate elixir (more than 80 proof) as well as cold remedies, including Contac Severe Cold Formula and Dristan Ultra Colds Formula. Liquid iron or amin formulas also may contain alcohol.

(Continued on back page)

## INHALANT UPDATE

National surveys show inhalant use ranks third behind alcohol and marijuana. The most effective way to fight solvent use is through prevention and education efforts. When inhaled, most commonly abused vaporous substances act as central nervous system depressants. They disturb vision, impair judgment and reduce muscle control. Inhalant use can cause permanent brain damage and even death. Here's a list of products that young people might sniff. This information is provided to heighten awareness of the potential for abuse of these common and easily obtainable products. Please use this information discreetly and appropriately.

### ADDITIVES

gasoline additives

### ADHESIVES

building supply adhesives

false eyelash adhesives

fingernail adhesives

PCV pipe adhesives

### AGENTS

engine drying agents

### CEMENTS

household cement

model cement (glue)

### CLEANERS

auto body cleaners

car engine cleaners

electronic equipment cleaners

gun cleaning solvent

window cleaner

### COATINGS

aerosol leather coatings

frying pan/pot coatings

### DE-ICERS

windshield de-icers

### FLUIDS

brake fluid

charcoal starter fluid

fire extinguisher fluid

lighter fluid

power steering fluid

printer fluid

transmission fluid

typewriter correction fluid

### FUELS

lantern fuel

stove fuel

### GASOLINE

### HARDENERS

fingernail hardener

### MARKERS

felt tip markers

dry erase marker

### OCTANE BOOSTERS

### PAINTS

aerosol paint

lacquer paint

liquid paint

### PENS

fast-drying pens

### POLISH

fingernail polish

shoe polish

### PRODUCTS

fiberglass refinishing products

photographic chemical products

resin products

shoe shine products

water proofing products

### PROPELLANT GASES

fluorocarbons

hydrocarbons

### REMOVERS

asphalt remover

fingernail polish remover

paint remover

stain remover

tar remover

### SEALANT

tire sealant

### STRIPPERS

paint strippers

varnish strippers

### SUPPLIES

art supplies

household cleaning supplies

furniture refinishing supplies

### THINNERS

paint thinner

### VARNISH

furniture varnish

wood varnish

Reported to Alcohol and Drug Abuse Pulse Beats, August 1988, by Parents in Action in Nebraska.



(Above) First National Bank Vice President, Todd West, presents "Team Up!..." basketball to Floyd Dryden Middle School student.

## "Team Up! Beat Sniffing!"

Alaska Council urges all Alaskans to "team up" against inhalant abuse by supporting awareness campaign



(Right) Press conference held at East High School officially kicks off awareness campaign.

of students who had used inhalants or knew of someone now using," Jeanne Fischer, assistant principal at East High School said. Fischer believes the positive manner in which the campaign is being presented encourages students to come forth and share much more effectively than "scare tactics" that are often used in connection with other drug campaigns.

Alaskan youth are facing dangerous times right now with inhalant abuse be-

(Continued on Page 6)

**D**uring the past two months, 12 to 18 year old youth who live in Fairbanks, Gambell, Valdez, Napakiak and hundreds of other Alaskan communities began receiving urgent information about inhalant abuse through the Alaska Council's "Team Up! Beat Sniffing!" campaign. The drug awareness campaign was officially kicked off in Anchorage and is now moving with full force through 318 schools in the state.

"Team Up! Beat Sniffing!" was unveiled on January 24 before students, teachers and media representatives at a press conference held at East High School

in Anchorage. Alaska Council staff members explained the purpose of the statewide campaign and cautioned students about the dangers of sniffing harmful fumes from a variety of commercial products ranging from fuels to non-stick fry pan coatings. Participants were challenged to join the team to "beat sniffing" not only in Anchorage, but in all regions of the state. On February 3, a similar presentation was held at Floyd Dryden Middle School in Juneau where Bette O' Moor, the Alaska Council's Executive Director, warned 150 students about the health risks of inhalant abuse.

"We were astounded at the number

### What's Inside?

Drug Information . . . . . 2

Library Resources . . . . . 8

Legislative Information . . . . . 10

Visual Views . . . . . 12

Coming Events . . . . . 15

(Continued from Page 1)



"We were astounded at the number of students who had used inhalants or knew of someone now using,"

Jeanne Fischer,  
Assistant Principal  
East High School  
Anchorage

(Left) Executive Director, Bette O'Moor, is interviewed by KIMO-TV, Anchorage.  
(Center) Members of East High School's Native Culture Club basketball team are honored at the campaign kick-off.

(Below) Campaign posters and basketballs now being sent to schools.

coming the fastest growing drug problem in the state. In fact, the percentage of junior high and high school students in Alaska who have used inhalants is reported to be higher than that of teenage users nationwide. This is why the Alaska Council is determined to reach as many youth as possible with their message.

"Team Up! Beat Sniffing!" attempts to refocus attention on the growing problem and to raise public awareness that inhalant abuse is a total community issue requiring cooperation and commitment from many to address it successfully. Parents, educators, community health organizations and especially youth-at-risk are being asked to join in a comprehensive effort to prevent future abuse from occurring.

The campaign has the potential to reach hundreds of Alaskans and Alaskan families. Beyond a simple lecture approach, it creatively involves youth by linking its prevention message to a healthy activity enjoyed by many—basketball. Posters featuring East High School's Native Culture Club basketball team are being distributed to schools along with purple-and-white basketballs imprinted with the "Team Up! Beat Sniffing!" slogan. In addition, a variety of resources for adults are blanketing the state including informational brochures, fact sheets, inhalant abuse research papers, nationwide studies and more.



Funding for the basketballs and their distribution to schools comes from First National Bank of Anchorage and MarkAir Inc. To lend further support, First National Bank has asked several of their Branch Vice Presidents to coordinate presentations of the "Team Up! Beat Sniffing!" campaign in schools where branches are located.

"The campaign is really raising the awareness level among students and educators," East High's Jeanne Fischer said. "We were surprised at the kind of information it brought out."

To learn more about the campaign and preventing inhalant abuse in Alaska, contact the Alaska Council at 257-9330.



#1

825  
5/6  
VA

## Breakdown of chemical inhalant use

(8th-12th grade sampling)

▶ Gasoline	28.4%
▶ Glue	22.6%
▶ Removers (paint, polish, etc.)	17.5%
▶ Sprays (paint, etc.)	17.1%
▶ Polish (shoe, fingernail, etc.)	6.6%
▶ Other	7.8%

# Inhalant abuse on the rise

By PAMELA STOCK

X 1-25-92

TIMES WRITER

East Anchorage High School student Jazyk Sharpe saw lots of kids with their noses pressed to gasoline tanks when he lived in Kotzebue. James Young saw fellow students sniffing typewriter correction fluid and getting high off the fumes of felt-tipped pens in class.

"You see it all the time, once they start doin' it, they keep at it all through class," said Young, 16, a member of the East Anchorage High School Native Culture Club basketball team.

The basketball team, featured in an anti-sniffing poster, and about 80 students of the school's Elitnaurvik Within East program participated Friday morning in the unveiling of a new campaign to increase awareness about the dangers of inhalant abuse.

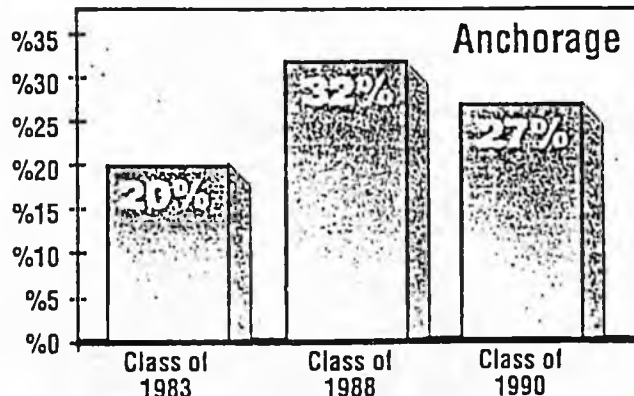
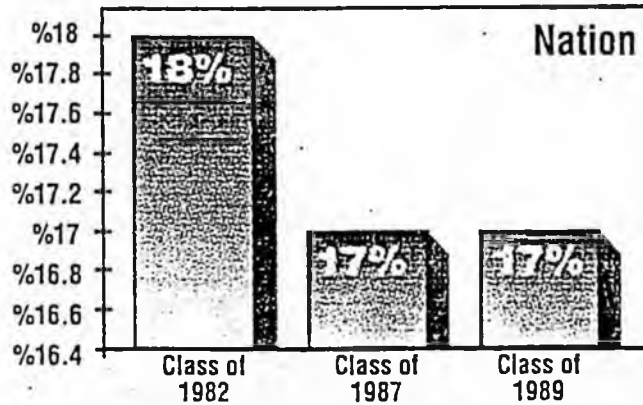
"Our main message to you is not to start," said Bette O'Moor, executive director of the Alaska Council on the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, at the East High School library.

The numbers of youths and adults sniffing glue, ink, paint, gasoline, hair spray and other household products is increasing more than the number of people snorting cocaine, smoking crack

See Sniff, back page

## Inhalant use

Percentage of high school seniors who have used inhalants.



SOURCE: Anchorage School District/Alaska Council for the Prevention of Drug Abuse

# A death in Nome #

## *And a call to action*

It was just a small story in Saturday's paper, a police report out of Nome about a boy who died after sniffing gasoline. It took only six sentences, and it was easy to miss, just like it's easy to dismiss sniffing gasoline and glue and spray paint. After all, we never hear about them in the war on drugs. How much of a problem can they be?

Here is the story behind the story:

The Nome boy who died was 12 years old. (Solvent abuse has been seen in children as young as 5.)

The boy had been with two friends, 11 and 14 years old. (A quarter of school-age Alaskans say they abuse inhalants. That's nearly four times the national average. And the Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse believes the number is even higher, according to feedback it's gotten from a brochure it recently distributed to schools across the state.)

The youngsters had been sniffing gasoline from a portable can. (Gasoline is the inhalant of choice in much of rural Alaska. Used for snowmachines and four-wheelers, it is cheap and available.)

Rescuers found the 12-year-old unconscious and were unable to revive him. (Sniffing gasoline can result in instant death, on the first or 10th or 100th time a person inhales the fumes. The heart simply stops beating. And it can kill its victims in other ways. They can die after choking on their vomit or passing out on a frigid night or lighting a cigarette while soaked with gasoline.)

The other two boys lived. (But inhaling gasoline and other solvents can impair thinking and memory, causing irritable and confused behavior. It can permanently damage the brain, the lungs, the liver and the kidney.)

Sniffing gasoline has a lot in common with abusing alcohol. People do it out of boredom or frustration or because they feel inferior or because their friends do it. And, like abusing alcohol, sniffing gasoline carries a high price.

Only sniffing gasoline, more than any other drug, is the escape of the poor and the powerless. Here in Alaska, it's the drug of the young. And it deserves our attention.

#3

POLICE REPORT ADN 2/22/92

**Boy dies after sniffing gas**

NOME — Authorities said a 12-year-old boy was dead after he and two companions were sniffing gasoline. Rescuers alerted Thursday night found the boy lying unconscious underneath some trailers used as apartments. Efforts to revive him on the spot failed. He was pronounced dead later at an area hospital. The victim's name was not released. Authorities said he and two companions — aged 11 and 14 — were sniffing gas from a portable can.

# Inhalant abuse

By MARGARET THOMAS

THE JUNEAU EMPIRE

Organizers of a statewide inhalant-awareness campaign had pictured a rural teen-ager in colorful clothes riding a snow machine into the sunset under the slogan, "Follow Your Dreams."

But when they tested the idea in rural Alaska, kids convinced them it was dumb.

"They actually laughed at us," said Sheryl Snyder of the Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Anchorage, which is sponsoring the campaign. Many teens ride snow machines out of town and stop to get high on fumes from the gas tanks, the council was told.

It proved once again that adults, as well as kids, need educating about a form of chemical abuse known as "sniffing." There's no lurking dealer; no powder, pipes or pills to tip parents; the danger is as invisible as gasoline fumes.

Eventually, coordinators of the awareness campaign settled on a basketball theme and the slogan, "Team Up! Beat Sniffing." The program got started last month in Anchorage and is moving statewide.

Last week, Bette O'Moor, council director, spoke to about 150 students at Juneau's Floyd Dryden Middle School, and other Juneau schools will receive packets of information about inhalants for distribution to students, teachers and parents, Snyder said.

O'Moor told students at Floyd Dryden to "learn the warning signs," though she didn't tell them which substance are dangerous. Professionals are worried that naming the products teens use to get high could contribute to the problem.

A 1989 survey by the University of Alaska Anchorage indicated that one-quarter of Alaska teen-agers in grades seventh through 12th have tried sniffing. That's more than 3.7 times the national average.

The problem is especially serious in the Bush, Snyder said. Illegal drugs are expensive in rural areas, but gasoline is easy to find.

In Southeast Alaska, sniffing is less common, said Don Dapcevich, chemical dependency administrator for the city-borough of Juneau. "It certainly hasn't been prevalent and it certainly doesn't match our problem with alcohol and marijuana," he said.

Adults generally are unaware of the habit, and teens often are unaware of the hazards, Snyder said. Fuels, paints, household cleaners and aerosol sprays give off fumes that are intoxicating and addictive, she said.

Users soak rags with solvents or spray aerosols into a bag and inhale the fumes. Breathing the chemicals can cause lung disorders, kidney failure, brain damage and death.

"The range of substances used is so dramatic you couldn't possibly put warnings on every label," Dapcevich said.

But what adults can do is be aware of the signs of inhalant abuse, the council said. The breath of users sometimes smells like chemicals and they may develop a rash or ulcers around the mouth and nose. Red, teary eyes, slurred speech, a frequent cough, an unsteady gait and weight loss are other side effects.

Users also report nausea, headaches, nosebleeds, increased light sensitivity, double vision and ringing in the ears.

#4

JUNEAU  
EMPIRE  
MARCH 1992

AUG 18 1988

Tundra Drums

Client No. 416

## Youth found dead near open gasoline container

ANCHORAGE (AP)—When last seen alive, 14-year-old Freddy George was wandering the streets of Pilot Station in the middle of the night.

A police officer told the boy to go home, but instead he went to a ramshackle cabin near the Yukon River used to store fishing gear.

The Alaska State Troopers say Freddy George apparently died that night after inhaling fumes from an open can of gasoline.

John Evan and his son, Freddy, 12, found his body the next morning on Aug. 10 as they prepared to go fishing.

"When I first saw him, I thought he was sleeping. I couldn't recognize him for awhile," Evan said. "I asked my Freddy to come see who it was. I've been feeling pretty bad about that."

Freddy George often stayed out late, said Patrick Nick, the village public safety officer. When the boy went home, it was usually to his married sister's house. He and his sister and their mother, Sarah, were the only living members of the immediate family, Nick said.

The boy is the second in the Yukon Delta to die in recent weeks after inhaling gas fumes. A 14-year-old Emmonak boy died during a party in late July after he reportedly drank homemade liquor and inhaled gasoline fumes.

Officials said gas-sniffing is a dangerous form of substance abuse that can be addictive and sometimes leads to death from asphyxiation.

"That goes on in the 20's," said Trooper Capt. Diana Godfrey, who heads the agency's rural law en-

forcement effort. "Quite often, it's youngsters, teenagers and pre-teens, who are experimenting with substances. The potential of that being fatal is very high. You get a quick high and all of a sudden, it's too late."

"There's no trend," said Godfrey, who formerly served with the Troopers in Bethel. "I don't see an inordinate number of people dying from sniffing gas. It's nothing we are taking lightly."

Evan said he has been troubled ever since the morning he found the boy's body.

"That's the first time I've found somebody like that," he said. "It's pretty hard to take. I didn't want to go fishing. When I got home, I called the priest. I talked to him. I didn't want to keep it in me. If you keep it inside, it seems to get worse."

TUNDRA  
DRUMS  
9/18/88

#6

QUALITY SERVICES

Date JUL 18 1988

Tundra Drums

Client No. 100

## Boy dies at party

ANCHORAGE (AP) — A 14-year-old Emmonak boy died during a weekend party near his village after he reportedly drank home-brewed liquor and sniffed gasoline, the Alaska State Troopers reported.

Troopers identified the youth as Robert Hamilton.

They said he had been at a party with other youths on a beach along the Yukon River early Sunday. He passed out and could not be revived, troopers said.

An autopsy was scheduled for Tuesday in Anchorage.

## NATION

### 3 men found dead from laughing gas

LOS ANGELES — Lethal doses of laughing gas apparently killed three young men whose bodies were found by police in a pickup truck early today, police said.

The three, all believed to be around 20 years old, were found about 4:30 a.m. in a pickup truck parked in the Chatsworth area, said officer J. McClard.

"It looked like an accidental thing," McClard said. "They were doing something they shouldn't have been doing."

McClard said the victims, who have not been identified, were inhaling nitrous oxide, a colorless gas that is frequently used in combination with oxygen as a light anesthetic during dental work, childbirth or minor surgery.

It was unclear where the victims got the gas.

The men were not immediately identified.

# Fact Sheet

## Inhalants

### FACTORS INFLUENCING INHALANT USE<sup>(1)</sup>

- Socio-economic Status
- Cultural Identification
- Family Relationships
- School Success
- Self Esteem
- Personal/Emotional Problems
- Deviant Behavior
- Peer Encouragement/Sanctions
- Tolerance of Deviance
- Family Adjustment

### DRUG USE SURVEY<sup>(3)</sup>

Anchorage School District  
Percent Who Ever Used Inhalants

National			Anchorage		
Class of 1982	Class of 1987	Class of 1989	Class of 1983	Class of 1988	Class of 1990
18%	17%	17%	20%	32%	27%

### TYPES<sup>(2)</sup>

#### Solvents

Gasoline; Glue; Correction Fluid; Paint Thinner; Polish Remover; Lighter Fluid; Plastic Cement; Cleaning Fluid; Shoe Polish; Transmission Fluid

#### Aerosols

Hair Spray; Propelled Cooking Oils; Spray Deodorants; Insecticides; Paint

#### Gases

Whipped Cream (nitrous oxide propellant); ether; chloroform

#### Other Chemicals

Butyl Nitrite (originally, locker room deodorizers); Amyl Nitrite

### TYPES OF CHEMICALS INHALED/ PERCENT OF TIMES<sup>(1)</sup> (8th - 12th Grade Sampling)

Gasoline	28.4%
Glue	22.6%
Removers (paint, polish, etc)	17.5%
Sprays (paint, etc)	17.1%
Polish (shoe, fingernail, etc)	6.6%
Other	7.8%

#### Sources

(1) Tri Ethnic Center for Prevention Research, Ft. Collins CO (800) 835-8091

(2) Inhalants, Wisconsin Clearinghouse

(3) Anchorage School District Memorandum #92 (90-91)

# INHALANT ABUSE: A Problem We Can Solve Together!

## ■ What are Inhalants?

Inhalants are a diverse group of chemicals that produce psychoactive (mind-altering) effects when inhaled. Products with a high concentration of Toluene, a chemical compound used in various commercial products (glue or spray paint), are the most widely abused. Since the chemical products used for inhaling are made for legitimate commercial use (i.e., fuels, cleaners, paints, adhesives), they are readily available and many people do not think of them as harmful substances or drugs. In Alaska, gasoline is one of the most commonly abused inhalants because it is easily obtained, especially in rural areas, where families store gasoline drums just outside their homes.

## ■ Who Abuses Inhalants?

- **Twenty five percent of Alaskan youth reported having used inhalants**, according to a 1988 University of Alaska study which surveyed statewide drug use among students in grades 7 through 12. This rate is more than 3.7 times the national average.
- **Youth experiment with inhalants at significantly lower ages than other drugs** because they are easy to obtain and in most states (including Alaska) are not categorized as "illegal."
- **Studies indicate that young people who use inhalants are more likely to use other drugs also.** Inhalant abusers often go on to use marijuana and/or cocaine.
- **Alaskan youth are at extremely high risk for inhalant use.** They live in areas which are socially isolated, which are experiencing rapid cultural change, where alcohol and other drug use is common, and where social and economic deprivation prevail. Lack of jobs in a newly created cash economy also contributes to vulnerability. **Inhalant use becomes an inexpensive and readily available attempt at coping for youth who are experiencing the stresses of cultural transition.**
- **Inhalants are also used by adults.** Young people who become addicted continue to abuse inhalants on into adulthood, with it often becoming their "drug of choice."

## ■ Physical Effects

Inhalants are both psychologically and physically addictive. While the physical effects of inhalant abuse depend upon the chemicals in the product used, generally inhalant abusers risk:

- Reduced muscle and reflex control
- Impaired judgement
- Memory lapses
- Confusion
- Personality changes
- Slurred speech
- Depression and apathy
- Permanent brain damage
- Irreversible nerve damage
- Kidney and liver damage
- Permanent lung disorders
- Irreparable blood and bone marrow contamination
- Heart failure
- Instant death

## ■ Warning Signs

The following signs may indicate an individual is using inhalants:

- dry mouth/sores on mouth and nose
- bloody nose
- unpleasant chemical breath
- peculiar "spacey" behavior
- violent behavior
- lack of coordination
- increased coughing and salivation
- anemic
- cleaning rages in room or closet
- dried paint or spray on clothes/body

## ■ What Can We Do?

Inhalant abuse, like other forms of drug abuse, cannot be eliminated using any single strategy. Awareness, education, regulation, legislation, appropriation, healthy alternatives for youth, and safe storage of toxic substances are all key elements in alleviating this serious problem. Individually, it takes a lot of time and tremendous energy to make a little progress, but if people from all segments of our state are committed to working together we can effect change. Parents and families, teachers and schools, state and local policy makers, media, and business owners are just some of the people whose involvement is crucial.

There are many important roles to be played in reducing inhalant abuse in Alaska.

### ■ Parents can:

- take an inventory of their household, identifying products containing toxic chemicals
- store identified products in a locked cabinet or out of the reach of children
- educate children from an early age about "good smells" and "bad smells"
- learn the warning signs of inhalant abuse
- help their child get treatment, if needed

### ■ Schools can:

- train teachers and other school personnel regarding warning signs and potential risks of inhalant abuse by students
- include inhalants in their drug abuse curriculum
- keep copier fluid and other toxic products locked up and unavailable to students
- share information with parents if they suspect a student is abusing inhalants

### ■ Businesses can:

- become educated about which products they sell are potentially hazardous if inhaled.
- take responsibility for placing dangerous products behind cashier counters to limit access

### ■ Communities can:

- develop ordinances which require safe storage of toxic substances (i.e., locks on gas tanks and fuel drums)
- train community members in intervention and counseling skills
- in rural areas, develop tribal action plans which include inhalants
- provide support groups for youth
- sponsor workshops and conferences on community wellness, skill building and healthy lifestyles
- offer safe recreational opportunities for youth

### ■ Policy makers, legislators and state and local officials can support:

- **policy changes/laws** which would require safe storage of products containing dangerous chemicals
- **public awareness campaigns** to increase the awareness of people who do not recognize the seriousness of inhalant abuse and how to prevent it. Public service announcements, print ads, and educational materials are just some of the parts of a comprehensive media campaign to address this serious issue.
- **education for treatment providers** regarding ways to tailor treatment programs to address the special needs of inhalant abusers.
- **funding for prevention and treatment programs in Alaska to specifically address inhalants.** SR No. 18, passed in 1989, expanded the responsibilities of the Division of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse to include prevention, education and treatment of inhalant abusers. Unfortunately, to date, there has been no appropriation of funds to accomplish this task.

#### Sources:

- "Inhalant Abuse in Rural Alaska Presentation at 1990 Tri-Discipline Conference," Nastasia Markham Wahlberg, May 1990 (handout).
- "Inhalants: An Overview," Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, February 1990.
- "Inhalants," DHSS Publication No. (ADM) 80-973, National Institute on Drug Abuse
- "Inhalants," *Impact: A Newsletter of Chemical Health in Minnesota*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1988-89.

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# **INHALANTS: AN OVERVIEW**

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February 1990

# Table of Contents

Inhalants: An Overview	
I. Effects.....	1
II. Prevalence.....	2
III. Youth At Risk.....	3
IV. Symptoms.....	4
A. Physical Signs of Use	
B. Psychological Symptoms	
C. Sociological Effects/Symptoms	
V. Treatment.....	6
VI. Prevention.....	7
Bibliography.....	9

## INHALANTS - AN OVERVIEW

The problem of inhalant abuse has been recorded in literature worldwide, and in research reports from Mexico, Canada, the United States, Japan, England, Sweden, Norway and Germany. Reports of the use of inhalants date back to the early 1800's when nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform were first used as intoxicants. Since the early 1960's, reported use of inhalants has spread to the use of gasoline, paint thinners, nail polish remover, spray paints, and numerous other toxic substances containing various chemical compounds, the most popular of which contain the chemicals benzene and toluene.

As recently as ten years ago, the use of inhalants, while recognized as a harmful means of chemical euphoria, was not associated with a drug-using subculture. Most use was thought to be experimental and within isolated groups of youth. Distribution was considered to be not-for-profit and there was no knowledge of ritual or jargon connected with use. Today, this is not the case. A recent report in the Chicago Tribune indicates that the "tolley" (toluene) problem has reached epidemic proportions in parts of the United States. "Pushers" buy toluene in the form of paint thinner and sell small amounts in dollar-sized bottles to kids on the street, netting a profit of up to \$150 from a can bought for \$10.<sup>1</sup> "Tolley" and various other forms of inhalants are now known as "kids drugs". Use is often not recognized by parents and police until youth become involved in the criminal justice system and juvenile courts.

### I. PHYSICAL EFFECTS

The inhalation of toxic substances through the lungs carries chemicals via the bloodstream directly to the brain, producing an almost immediate sensation of excitation or euphoria. Chemicals contained in most inhaled substances are lipid (fat) soluble and are stored in the brain, central nervous system, reproductive organs, lungs, kidneys, liver, and bone marrow.

Five types of substances account for approximately 92 percent of all common inhalants. In a survey done in 1989 by Beauvais and Oetting, Native American youth reported that their choice of inhalants is based on availability, with the following substances listed in order of prevalence: gasoline, glue, paint and polish removers, aerosols, and shoe and fingernail polish. Each of these substances consist of complex chemical compounds which contain toluene, benzene, acetone, and/or naphtha. These euphoria-producing chemicals act primarily as central nervous system depressants, impairing membrane permeability and neurotransmission. Freon, a propellant contained in aerosols, may cause extensive tissue damage due to freezing. Aerosol pan coating can cover the

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<sup>1</sup> "Tolley Imperils Uptown Youths" *Chicago Tribune*, September 10, 1989, Section I, p. 24.

lungs with an oil-based substance, cutting off oxygen absorption into the blood. Benzene may be harmful to the blood-producing elements in the body and is believed to cause chromosomal damage and leukemia in humans. Lead from gasoline cannot be detoxified and may be stored asymptotically in the body for long periods of time and then suddenly cause serious illness. Slow, but definite damage to the brain is irreversible.

Additional risks associated with inhalant use are numerous. About half of all chronic sniffers are found to have some form of chronic brain deficit.<sup>2</sup> Hepatitis, liver damage, muscular weakness, and sleep disorders are also reported. The reversibility of injury to internal organs is not yet known. Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome (SSDS), in which hydrocarbons over-stimulate the heart muscle, causing it to beat very fast and irregularly and then stop, can occur. Death has also been caused by aspiration, fire, suffocation, resultant violent behaviors, damage to vital organs, and lead poisoning.<sup>3</sup>

## II. PREVALENCE

**"Inhalant use by high school seniors has increased steadily at a time that most other drug use has declined. Annual inhalant use, for example, increased from 4.3 percent in 1983 to 6.9 percent in 1987."<sup>4</sup>**

This statement from the National Institute on Drug Abuse points out an increasing, although somewhat unrecognized emerging problem of drug abuse among our nation's youth. In Alaska, the statistics are even more alarming. A University of Alaska study which surveyed statewide drug use among students in grades 7 through 12 found that 16.5 percent of all students had used inhalants in 1983. In 1988, the figure had risen to 25.9 percent, more than 3.7 times the national average and an increase of 9.4 percent statewide over the past five years!<sup>5</sup> These figures are particularly distressing when one considers that they do not include statistics for youth who are no longer in school. Research confirms a high drop-out rate for drug-abusing students; the rate may be even higher for those involved with inhalant use.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen, S., "Inhalants" *Handbook on Drug Abuse*, University of California, Los Angeles, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> Van Duzen, J.; Welty, T., "Gasoline and Solvent Sniffing: A Serious Problem Among Indian Adolescents" 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Crider, R.A.; Rouse, B., "Inhalant Overview" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Segal, B., "Drug-Taking Behavior Among Alaskan Youth - 1988: A Follow-up Study" Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies, University of Alaska Anchorage, November 1988. p. 96.

<sup>6</sup> Novak, A., "The Deliberate Inhalation of Volatile Substances" *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs*, Vol. 12 (2) April - June 1980, p. 108.

Although the use of inhalants crosses all socioeconomic, geographic, and racial boundaries, it has long been associated with problems of acculturation, poverty, and social isolation which plague underprivileged minorities. High rates also occur in subcultures where alcohol and other drug abuse is common.<sup>7</sup> The Minnesota Department of Human Services in December 1988 reported that 83 percent of all inhalant detox admissions involved American Indian youth.<sup>8</sup> Johnson et.al. (1987) found that in the United States more than 15 percent of all youth will try inhalants. In some populations, such as Barrio-Hispanics and Native Americans living on reservations, more than one-third will try inhalants before the age of 18.<sup>9</sup> When looking specifically at inhalant use in Native American communities, Barnes (1981) found rates to be lowest in communities which have expanded social assets and widespread acculturation to the white man's lifestyle. Highest rates of use were found in communities which had few social assets and were experiencing rapid change and conflict due to acculturation.<sup>10</sup>

### III. YOUTH AT RISK

Inhalant abuse is clearly a problem of the young. Reports show that inhalants are the drug used most frequently by Native American youth. Although inhalants are not the first drug of choice for most, youth report that they are readily available and in most areas are not categorized as "illegal". Youth try inhalants at significantly lower ages than they try cigarettes, marijuana, or alcohol. One study found that fifteen percent of all elementary school students (grades 4 to 6) had tried inhalants.<sup>11</sup> While the inhalation or sniffing of volatile substances was originally thought to predominantly be a male activity, the gender gap appears to be closing.<sup>12</sup>

Inhalant use is a "peer-originated and peer-perpetuated activity".<sup>13</sup> Sixty-six to seventy-five percent of inhalant-using youth report initiating

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7 "Psychological Effects of Inhalant Abuse and Its Interference with Psychotherapy" Miami Indian Health Service, P.O. Box 1498, Miami, Oklahoma 74354.

8 "Inhalants: Sniffing for a High" *Impact: A Newsletter of Chemical Health in Minnesota*. Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter 1988-89, p. 2.

9 Oetting, E.R.; Edwards, R.W.; Beauvais, F., "Social and Psychological Factors Underlying Inhalant Abuse" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, p. 177.

10 Smart, R., "Inhalant Use and Abuse in Canada" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, pp. 132-133.

11 Beauvais, F; Oetting E.R., "Indian Youth and Inhalants: An Update" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, p. 41.

12 Cohen, S., loc. cit. p.213

13 Cohen, S., op. cit. p. 213.

use at the invitation of a friend or relative. In one survey, youth reported being encouraged by friends to use inhalants more frequently than any other drug.<sup>14</sup> A high percentage of users also report that their friends and/or siblings currently use. Oetting and Beauvais conclude that any attack on the problem of young inhalant use must take peer clusters into account if it is to be successful.<sup>15</sup>

The problem of youth-at-risk for inhalant abuse is further heightened by indications that young people who begin using solvents may be more likely to be involved in other drug abuse. One study found that youth who began using solvents were as likely to become involved with other drugs as those whose first drug of use was marijuana.<sup>16</sup> Other reports show that young adolescents continue to use inhalants while adding other drugs. If inhalant use drops off, the high level of personal problems and early drug experience often leads to the abuse of a variety of other drugs. In any case, the early use of inhalants as a recreational activity certainly points to dangers of deepening drug involvement in subsequent years.

Unfortunately, as the aforementioned research suggests, and state statistics conclude, Alaskan youth are at extremely high risk for inhalant use. Alaskan youth live in areas which are socially isolated, which are experiencing rapid cultural change, and in which alcohol and other drug use is common. In addition to the socio-cultural and economic factors which place Alaskan youth at risk for inhalant abuse, these children live in rural communities where many inhalants are readily available. Because all-terrain vehicles and motor boats are common means of transportation, most families store gasoline drums just outside their homes. Recently reported inhalant abuse deaths in the state include one describing, a youth who had been seen with his head over the gas tank of the family boat engine. He was later found drowned in a river near his village.

#### IV. SYMPTOMS

##### A. Physical Signs of Use

The immediate effects of solvent and aerosol inhalation may last from 5 to 45 minutes after cessation. Users report feelings of excitement, euphoria and omnipotence, blurring of vision, irregular heartbeats, numbness, weightlessness, and a distortion of time and space. The intensity of effects ranges from mild intoxication to unconsciousness; there

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<sup>14</sup> Sharp, C; Carroil, L., "Inhalant Abuse Among Pueblo Tribes of New Mexico" *Voluntary Inhalation of Industrial Solvents*, National Institute of Drug Abuse, Rockville, MD.

<sup>15</sup> Oetting, E.R.; Edwards, R.W.; Beauvais, F., loc. cit. p. 185.

<sup>16</sup> Frank, B.; Marel, R.; and Schmeidler, J., "The Continuing Problem of Youthful Solvent Abuse in New York State" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, pp. 92-93.

may be partial or total amnesia. Tolerance may develop, resulting in the use of increasing amounts to achieve the desired effects.

Teary, glazed, or reddened eyes are symptomatic of persons who are using inhalants. They may also exhibit slurred speech, frequent cough, weight loss, loss of muscle coordination, unsteady gait, and erratic or "spacey" behavior. Unpleasant chemical breath may be accompanied by a rash or ulcers around the mouth and nose. Users report nausea, headache, nosebleeds, eye irritation, increased light sensitivity, double vision, and ringing in the ears.<sup>17</sup> Physical dangers and symptoms increase with frequency of use and can end in hospitalization, coma, and even death.

## B. Psychological Symptoms

The use of inhalants has been closely associated with depression. In a study by Allan and Ghodse, 70 percent of solvent abusers surveyed reported that they used inhalants because they were depressed.<sup>18</sup> Inhalant users exhibit high levels of anxiety, psychopathology, depression, and suicide, and report feelings of anger and alienation. As with most youth involved with drugs, inhalant users tend to have low self-esteem and do not access traditional sources of help. Psychological and social development is arrested at the time that drug use begins.

It has been suggested that the use of inhalants by young people may provide strong feelings of power and influence which might otherwise be lacking in their lives.<sup>19</sup> Beauvais poses that the use of inhalants may be an attempt by youth to reduce the stress provoked by rapid culture change (culture shock).<sup>20</sup>

## C. Sociological Effects/Symptoms

Research shows a high correlation between inhalant abuse and crime. Youth who are involved in inhalant use are known to show high rates of truancy, decreased scholastic performance, and negative interactions with school authorities. Many drop out of school completely. Most become loners and are excluded from the activities of their non-sniffing peers. Signs of use include: loss of interest in personal appearance, food, and family; cleaning rags in the bedroom, closet or

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17 "Inhalants" National Native Association of Treatment Directors, P.O. Box 1882, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7K3SZ

18 Jacobs, A.; Ghodse, A., "Depression In Solvent Abusers" *Social Science Medicine*, Vol. 24, No. 10, 1987, pp. 864-865.

19 White, K., "Handbook on Solvent Abuse" Project Solvabuse, Indian and Inuit Health Services, Medical Services Branch, Canada, p. 4.

20 Beauvais, F., "Social and Psychological Characteristics of Inhalant Abusers" *Paper Presented at the World Health Organization Group Meeting on Adverse Effects of Volatile Substances/Inhalants*, Mexico City, April 1986.

basement; dried paint on clothing or body; and empty spray cans or tubes of glue in and around living areas.

## V. TREATMENT

Research indicates that few people in the health care system have a clear or systematic applied concept of the nature of the inhalant abuse problem.<sup>21</sup> There are few models available for the treatment of young inhalant users. The multiplicity of problems surrounding these youth make them difficult to fit into existing programs. Most youth come to treatment as referrals from the criminal justice system, and without family assistance and support. Many have histories of unsatisfactory encounters with helping professionals which have led to distrust and apathy. Most have been involved in inhalant abuse for two to three years prior to entering treatment. Although few enter treatment voluntarily, most do not stop using without professional assistance. The rate at which inhalant abusers drop out of treatment is higher than that of other drug abusers. In addition, inhalant users are asked to leave treatment settings due to rule infractions at twice the rate of other addicts.<sup>22</sup>

Inhalant abusers appear to be less verbal and to suffer more severe psychological impairment than other addicts.<sup>23</sup> These youth have low self-esteem and are either very withdrawn, or uncooperative and disruptive in treatment settings. Research indicates that inhalant users have less ego strength than most addicts, possibly due to the fact that even among drug-using subcultures, the use of inhalants carries a negative social stigma as being "low class" or "kids' stuff." As stated previously, young inhalant users have high levels of psychopathology, depression, suicide, and anxiety and may require more intensive care than other addicts. Physiological difficulties affecting treatment include: memory lapse, confusion, depression, tremors, nausea, psycho-motor dysfunction, disorientation, and joint and muscle pain.

Pilot research suggests that the cognitive demands of most treatment settings are beyond the grasp of many inhalant abusers.<sup>24</sup> For these clients, the ability to keep appointments, tolerate the treatment environment, and establish basic trust are major undertakings. Inhalant users appear to be unmotivated and "test" staff intensely. Treatment is best targeted to disruptive youth, allowing for greater individualized attention and support. Behavior-oriented strategies with positive reinforcement of even small

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21 Mason, T., "Inhalant Abuse and Treatment" University of Houston, U.S. Department of H.E.W., 1979, p. 53.

22 Mason, T., *op.cit.* p. 43.

23 McSherry, T., "Program Experience With The Solvent Abuser in Philadelphia" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, p. 115.

24 McSherry, T., *op.cit.* p.118.

demonstrations of appropriate behavior are warranted. Successful designs focus on basic living skills such as socialization, personal hygiene, verbal communication, and simple self disclosure. Structured and unstructured recreational activities can assist in the rehabilitation of psychomotor activities and the learning of appropriate interpersonal skills. The use of peer leaders and counselors appears to be effective, along with the assignment of special responsibilities to increase personal power. To assess possible nervous system impairment, it is suggested that inhalant abusers receive complete psychological and physical exams upon entering treatment.

## VI. PREVENTION

As is true of prevention strategies for any type of drug abuse, strategies for the prevention of inhalant abuse must be comprehensive with multiple points of entry. The most successful self-regulating designs appear to be educational campaigns.<sup>25</sup> Because predisposing factors are in place by 4th and 5th grades, prevention education must begin early. Since friends and siblings provide access and instruction for inhalant use, the involvement of "peer clusters" in the design, implementation, and delivery of services is important. Inhalant users tend to be more socially isolated and alienated than other youth, making community education, socialization, and basic life skills important aspects of prevention programming. Outreach must go beyond the school and into the community.

Effective and comprehensive prevention efforts must couple educational programming with sociological and legislative change and public awareness. The alarming rate of inhalant use among Alaskan youth was recognized by the Alaska State Legislature in 1989. Senate Resolution No. 18 expanded the responsibilities of the State Office of Alcohol and Drug Abuse to include prevention, education and treatment of inhalant abusers. Federally, the Toxic Substance Control Act of 1976, administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, contains provisions for the regulation and possible banning of products containing toxic substances which are found to be unreasonable health risks. Legislation also mandates a limit to the amount of lead which can be contained in gasoline to diminish toxicity which can lead to lead poisoning. The amount of benzene in gasoline is considered such a hazard to health that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration set standards for the amount of gas fumes to which workers can be exposed. Environmental concerns about aerosols interfering with the ozone layer in the troposphere have resulted in a reduction in the use of freon as a propellant. Since chemical inhalants are not covered under the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, there are no federal penalties for the possession or sale of these products. Thirty-one states have passed laws

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<sup>25</sup> Kerner, K., "Current Topics In Inhalant Abuse" *Epidemiology of Inhalant Abuse: An Update*, NIDA Research Monograph No. 85, 1988, p. 21.

prohibiting the sniffing of volatile substances. Infractions are generally considered misdemeanors and are punishable by a minor jail sentence or fine. Some states include penalties under laws such as those for public drunkenness.

Legislation, however, is only one aspect of the number of sociological strategies which can be employed to combat and to prevent inhalant use. Community education is vital. Since the choice to use inhalants is largely based on availability, owners of retail outlets must be informed and educated about the patterns of use. Communities can make local decisions to limit or ban the sale of certain products to minors or to keep toxic substances safely behind cashier counters. Rural communities can take actions which result in the safe storage of toxic substances, including locks on gas tanks and fuel drums. We need to educate each other about the warning signs of inhalant abuse so tragedies resulting in death and disability can be avoided. We must raise our awareness about this growing problem among youth and offer safe recreational opportunities, support groups, counseling, and education to high-risk youth. Above all, we must learn to "tune in" to our youth and give them direction for the healthy resolution of their conflicts and fears.

The problem of inhalant use, like other forms of drug abuse, cannot be solved using a single strategy. Awareness, education, regulation, healthy alternatives for youth, and safe storage of toxic substances are all necessary. Likewise, all segments of a population/community must work together to bring change. What we do does count! We can make a difference!

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## nts affecting Alaskan youth?

to increase dramatically among Alaskan youth, and, unfortunately, those who how dangerous this activity can be. only sniffed because it is easily obtained, especially in villages where fuel is stored ines and all-terrain vehicles. Tragically, gas sniffing has caused the deaths of many

re experiencing vast cultural and economic changes in their villages, traditional y challenged. This can disrupt the harmony between individuals, families and ; people may feel confused, depressed and vulnerable as they struggle to embrace nts and other drugs are used as an attempt to cope with or escape from life's stresses.

Twenty five percent of Alaskan youth report having used inhalants in grades 7 through 12. This is more than 3.7 times the national average.

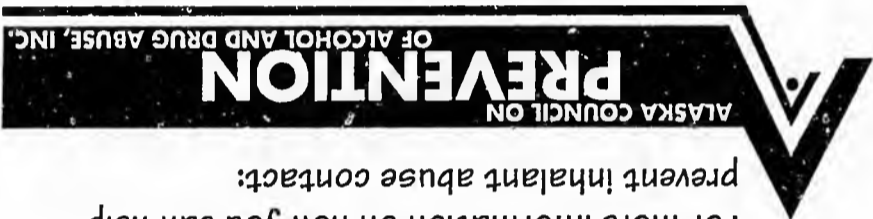
# ... WHAT ADULTS NEED TO KNOW



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# Team Up to BEAT SNIFFING

## Sniffing: An Unhealthy and Harmful High

Some call it "sniffing." Others say "gassing up." No matter what language is used to describe it, inhalant abuse is a serious health problem for Alaska's young people.

Inhalants are harmful chemicals which have mood-altering effects when their vapors are intentionally inhaled or sniffed. Since the products used for inhaling are found in almost every home, school, and work place, many people do not think of them as drugs. However, inhalants are drugs. Gasoline, glue, lighter fluid, paints, polish removers and marker pens are just a few of the hundreds of products young people sniff to get "high."

Dealing with the damage of inhalant abuse is not an easy matter. Long-term drug abuse treatment programs are often needed. This can be costly for abusers and their families.

The best way to deal with sniffing is to prevent young people from ever starting. This requires the efforts of parents, teachers and others in the community working together to prevent the problem.

This brochure is intended to answer important questions and offer suggestions of what you can do to help. *Join the team to beat sniffing!*

## Why do young people use inhalants?

- **Peer pressure**  
One of the most important factors, according to studies, is peer pressure. The desire to belong is overwhelming.
- **Availability**  
Substances like gasoline and cleaning products are easily found in and around homes, at school, and throughout most neighborhoods and villages.
- **Cost**  
Youth find chemical products very affordable compared to other drugs. Inhalants can be obtained without ever spending a penny.
- **Immediate "high"**  
The mood-elevating effects of sniffing are experienced within seconds and last anywhere from five minutes to an hour.
- **Boredom**  
Youth sniff inhalants for "something to do." Research shows inhalants are used to reduce anxiety, to compensate for feelings of inferiority, or to escape frustration.
- **Few legal hassles**  
It is not illegal to be in possession of a gasoline or aerosol can. Therefore, youth often treat inhalants as unimportant, harmless substances.

*The first-time abuser or the long-term abuser can die while sniffing. This phenomenon is called "sudden sniffing death syndrome" and can occur the first time or any time harmful chemicals are sniffed.*

## What are the dangers?

- The initial euphoria obtained from inhaling is followed by disturbing symptoms of headache, muscle weakness, drowsiness and abdominal pain.
- Research shows that inhalant abuse can cause alarming and irreversible effects like leukemia, permanent paralysis and coma.
- Sniffers suffer nerve damage to the brain and to connecting nerve cells. Tests show that chronic users can lose their hearing as well as the ability to think, reason and remember. Hostility and confusion often occur.
- As the lungs are repeatedly assaulted with extreme doses of chemicals, air capacity is diminished and permanent lung disorders may result.
- The liver and kidneys no longer function efficiently after prolonged use. Consequently, body systems can be poisoned.
- Inhalants are both physically and psychologically addictive. Sniffers acquire a craving for the quick and easy high.

## What are the warning signs?

- walking unsteadily and lack of coordination
- watery eyes, runny nose, coughing
- slurred speech
- the smell of chemicals on the breath or clothing
- sniffing devices left lying around (may include plastic bags, saturated cloths, empty containers, etc.)
- unusual or erratic behavior (Many sniffers display violent and bizarre behaviors. They often act as though nothing can harm them. Others, however, become passive and enter a trance-like state.)

## What are the after-effects?

- frequent or severe headaches
- dizziness
- sores or rashes around the nose and mouth
- change in the urine (blood or redness)
- vomiting or stomach cramps
- little interest in school
- repeated association with other sniffers

## What can those who care do to help?

Sniffing is a problem that *will not go away* unless concerned Alaskans work together to prevent it. The cooperation of parents, teachers and communities is needed to help young people live healthier, happier, drug-free lives.

You can help protect young people from the devastating effects of inhalants. *Here are a few suggestions:*

- **Confirm your suspicions**  
If you think you know a young person who may be sniffing, talk to them. Find out what troubles them. Explain the risks associated with the habit.
- **Limit access to toxic substances**  
Lock up all harmful products where they cannot be used inappropriately. The same products used to operate a snowmachine, clean an engine, or paint a door can be extremely harmful when used for the wrong reasons.
- **Provide constant support**  
Take time to listen, understand and show support. Build trust.
- **Teach useful life skills**  
Help young people develop decision-making skills and self-esteem. Learning to say "no" to drug-abusing friends takes practice and courage.
- **Express your values**  
Be proud to pass along traditional values and beliefs. New ways can be blended with old ways so that everyone shares a positive sense of identity.
- **Involve youth in other activities**  
Young people are more likely to explore sniffing when they are not engaged in healthy, alternative activities. Sports like basketball, traditional Native activities like fishing and trapping, and community organized parties and dances are all drug-free ways to have fun.
- **Use all resources available**  
Reach out for support. Accept help from educators, people who work in drug prevention programs, family members or parents who have dealt with drug abuse. It takes the combined strength of many to prevent sniffing.
- **Present a positive role model**  
This, perhaps, is the most important way to prevent the problem of inhalant abuse. Adults who do not use drugs themselves send a strong signal to youth. *Your healthy choices can help young people make healthy choices, too.*

Parents, teachers and other adults can help youth avoid the dangers of inhalant abuse.  
**Team up to beat sniffing...before it starts!**