Raising Awareness:
Inhalants and Youth

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Statistics 2005 School
Safety Report

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Programs

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

RAISING AWARENESS: INHALANTS AND YOUTH


Inhalant use is the intentional inhalation of breathable chemical vapors that produce hallucinogenic effects. Inhalants can be found everywhere; cooking sprays, gasoline, whipped-cream cans, correction fluid, and video head spray cleaners are among the sources of toxic vapors. Inhalant use is common among young people. In fact, “One [in] five students in [the United States] has used an inhalant to get high by the time he or she reaches the eighth grade” (National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, NIPC, www.inhalants.org).

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, www.drugabuse.gov) reports that most of the inhalant abusers are young teens in seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. While it is important to teach children and youth about drug abuse in all forms, inhalants are one of the first drugs children encounter because they are readily available in most homes.

Inhalants present very real dangers. According to NIDA, “Even a single session of repeated inhalant abuse can disrupt heart rhythms and cause death from cardiac arrest or lower oxygen levels enough to cause suffocation. Regular abuse of [inhalants] can result in serious harm to vital organs including the brain, heart, kidneys, and liver.”

Common signs of inhalant use are an unusual breath odor or chemical odor on clothing, slurred or slowed speech, a general drunken appearance, paint or other products on the face or fingers, red or runny eyes or nose, spots or sores around the mouth, and nausea and loss of appetite. If you notice a teen displaying these signs, it is important to confront him or her. If you find that the teen is using inhalants, professional medical help should be administered immediately to help in the cessation of inhalant use—an inhalant user could die from the first huff or from any following abuse.

It is important to talk to teens about the dangers and consequences of inhalant use. Community Works Session 20 includes a three-page handout focused on the health hazards caused by inhaling specific chemicals, as well as a handout describing situations where teens may encounter drugs. Teens can role-play how to refuse when their peers offer them drugs.

For a free copy of Community Works Session 20, email tcc@ncpc.org. For more information about inhalant abuse and National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week, contact NIPC at www.inhalants.org.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) recently published Indicators of School Crime and Safety, 2005. The report provides data collected from students, staff, and communities in order to present many different perspectives on crime and safety. The full report is available online, as a PDF file, from www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/iscs05.htm.
We’re Looking for a Few Good Programs!

TCC staff are collecting information about exceptional TCC programs for a new monograph. If you have a great Community Works or Youth Safety Corps program and would like to share some of the highlights and challenges, service project success, and the impact this program has had on your students and the broader community, send an email to Lori Brittain at Lbrittain@ncpc.org.

If you have a question or concern you would like to see answered here, email tcc@ncpc.org.

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