



## Welcome

[www.inhalantsinfo.org.au](http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au)

We all take risks in our lives, doing things we know we shouldn't but hope we will get away with...driving above the speed limit is a perfect example. Most of the time we will get away with it but just occasionally we don't...we might just be booked for speeding or it might be an accident with devastating consequences...you just don't know what the outcome will be when you take that risk. Inhalant misuse is another example where with each episode the user takes a risk...what will the outcome be? Is it possible that being aware of the risks will help reduce the possibility of a devastating consequence?

As well as our usual articles, Amity Community Services share their story with us and we have some more resources to give away. We gladly welcome any feedback, suggestions or contributions to the newsletter and website. You can do this by sending an email to [info@inhalantsinfo.org.au](mailto:info@inhalantsinfo.org.au).

Regards

Ruth Mahon - NIIS Coordinator

## Inherent risks

**There is no safe level of inhalant use.** Misusing any substance, especially those not designed for consumption such as inhalants, brings with it the real possibility of temporary or permanent injury and possibly death. These injuries can be as a direct result of the actual chemical consumed or an environmental factor. This article will discuss what risks inhalant users face and introduce strategies to help reduce these risks.

The most obvious issue with consuming a product not meant for consumption is poisoning. Most of the chemicals found in inhalants are toxic to the body at some level. Some chemicals produce a reaction that is immediate, such as butane inducing cardiac arrhythmias. Others destroy the body organs over a period of time if consumption is regular. Benzene is an example of a chemical that is a known carcinogen. Combinations of chemicals may produce effects that are exaggerated because of their interactions. This includes inhalants used in combination with alcohol and other drugs.

There is a real risk for inhalant users of death or permanent disability as a result of asphyxiation, suffocation or choking. Inhalant chemicals replace oxygen in the blood. If too much chemical is inhaled the resulting lack of oxygen could cause unconsciousness. This is a problem if the user has covered their mouth or nose with a bag or container to inhale, as once they are unconscious there is no access to fresh air, leading to suffocation. Some inhalants cause vomiting, and a drowsy or unconscious user can easily choke on their vomit.

Frostbite can occur when chemicals, especially gases which are contained under pressure in aerosol cans, make contact with the skin or other parts of the body. While under pressure these

gases are in a liquid form having temperatures well below freezing point. This is a major problem if these aerosols are sprayed directly into the mouth. Many other chemicals also cause skin and eye irritation on contact.

The environment in which inhalants are used can impact on the risk to the user. The highly flammable nature of many chemicals in inhalants place users at risk if they are smoking or near fires while inhaling. Products such as petrol are particularly dangerous as ignition can be from either the liquid product or the vapour. Also, small enclosed spaces result in a concentration of vapours increasing the effect and potentially reducing the ability of the user to recover.

The use of some inhalants will produce hallucinations or feelings of invincibility in users. This is potentially a problem if the user is in an environment where they could act out and place themselves in harms way. Examples of dangerous environments include by railway lines, in cars or on top of buildings.

While it is acknowledged that there is no safe level of inhalant use and the use of inhalants should be discouraged, there are some chronic users who will continue to abuse inhalants regardless of efforts to stop them. For these users, harm reduction strategies may help reduce the risk of a harmful outcome. Strategies include:

- \* Avoid using inhalants alone (so help can be given if necessary)
- \* Avoid using inhalants in small or enclosed spaces
- \* Use less risky methods of inhalation ( eg. avoid spraying directly into mouth)

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- \* Avoid using inhalants in risky environments (eg. near railway lines)
- \* Avoid smoking or naked flames while using inhalants
- \* Avoid using inhalants in combination with alcohol or other drugs
- \* Avoid sudden exertion or stressful situations after using inhalants.

#### References:

d'Abbs P. & MacLean S. (2008), *Volatile substance misuse: a review of interventions*, Monograph Series (National Drug Strategy (Australia)), No. 65, Canberra: Australian Government, Dept. of Health and Ageing.

(2008) *Volatile substance use: a resource for professionals [CD-ROM]*, Perth: Drug and Alcohol Office

National Inhalant Abuse Taskforce (2006), *National directions on inhalant abuse, final report*. Melbourne: Victorian Government Department of Human Services

For emergency first aid or drug counselling see our HELP page: [http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au/page.php?page\\_id=26#EME](http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au/page.php?page_id=26#EME)

## A - Z of inhalant chemicals



The chemicals found in products classed as inhalants can have a range of effects on different parts of the body. In this series we will look at the most common of these chemicals, what they are found in, and their physiological effects.

### Cyclohexyl nitrite

**Other names:** colloquially as VCR "head cleaner"

**Molecular formula:** C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>11</sub>NO<sub>2</sub>

**Type:** Nitrite

**Appearance:** Yellow liquid, strong odour.

**Products found in:** Pure, often sold in small bottles.

**Flammability:** Flammable

**Effects of exposure:** Dilation of the blood vessels and smooth muscle relaxation.

Headache, dizziness, fainting, loss of inhibition, enhanced sensual feelings, drop in blood pressure.

**Warnings:** Should not be used in combination with Viagra or by people with depressed immune systems or glaucoma.

### 1, 1 - Difluoroethane

**Other names:** difluoroethane, Freon 152

**Molecular formula:** C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>4</sub>F<sub>2</sub>

**Type:** Gas

**Appearance:** Colourless, sweet odour, liquid when under pressure.

**Products found in:** Computer dusters, refrigerant (discontinued).

**Flammability:** Highly flammable

**Effects of exposure:** Depression of the central nervous system.

Euphoria, dizziness, drowsiness, headache, frostbite, loss of coordination, asphyxiation, and unconsciousness.

### Dimethyl ether

**Other names:** DME, dimethyl oxide, wood ether

**Molecular formula:** C<sub>2</sub>H<sub>6</sub>O

**Type:** Gas

**Appearance:** Colourless, sweet odour, liquid when under pressure

**Products found in:** As a propellant in aerosols (has replaced CFC's), refrigerant, solvent and in engine starting sprays.

**Flammability:** Highly flammable

**Effects of exposure:** Depression of the central nervous system.

Euphoria, dizziness, drowsiness, headache, frostbite, skin and eye irritation, loss of coordination and unconsciousness.

#### Source:


Pohanish, R. P ed. (2002) *Sittig's handbook of toxic and hazardous chemicals and carcinogens*, 4th ed., New York: Noyes Publications.

Stepstone Technologies (2008) *Toxipedia: connecting science and people*, viewed 23 February 2009, <http://toxipedia.org>

US Department of Health and Human Services (2008), *Agency for toxic substances and disease registry*, viewed 23 February 2009, <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/>

US Department of Health and Human Services (2008), *Hazardous Substances Data Bank: Dimethyl ether*, viewed 23 February 2009, <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov/cgi-bin/sis/search/r?dbs+hsdb:@term+@rn+115-10-6>

## Our Service

There are three components of the NIS, all of which are provided  of charge to everyone .

Our **Website** - Your first contact point if you are looking for information about inhalants. The site is divided into different sections to make finding information easy and is updated regularly.

Our **Database** - A list of all the inhalant resources we hold. We aim to collect all types of resources including books, journal articles, pamphlets, multimedia, posters & conference papers. This database currently holds 700 resources.

Our **Library Service** - We can supply you with information or resources through our Ask-A-Librarian service or keep you up to date with our current awareness newsletters. Feel free to make contact by emailing [info@inhalantsinfo.org.au](mailto:info@inhalantsinfo.org.au)

# Amity

Community Services Inc

In the  
Spotlight

## Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Indigenous Communities Project 2008-2009

Amity Community Services - Darwin

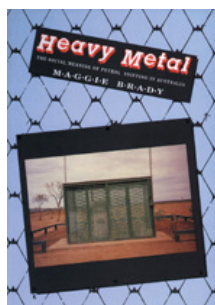
A one year project, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, aimed at reducing the health and social harms associated with volatile substance misuse (VSM) in the Top End region of the Northern Territory. The purposes of the project are to:

1. develop systems and processes that reduce supply and associated harms in the Greater Darwin region;
2. increase the capacity of Indigenous communities, in the Darwin region, to reduce the harms and demands of alcohol, drugs and volatile substances; and
3. increase the capacity of Amity Community Services and other service providers, individually and collectively, to work with Indigenous communities.

Specifically the project will:

- work with retailers to reduce the supply of volatile substances for misuse;
- advocate and lobby to strengthen Northern Territory legislation relating to VSM;
- collect anecdotal information relating to volatile substance misuse;
- develop inter-agency protocols to respond to VSM for the Darwin region, enhancing a multi-level service delivery contributing to harm minimisation in the Darwin region;
- work in partnership with government departments and other community organisations to increase coordination between services and access for Indigenous communities; and
- work with specific Indigenous communities, and relevant organisations, to increase community strengths and build healthy lifestyles. This may involve facilitating and supporting community initiatives, assisting in the development of community plans and assessments, increasing access to relevant information, and helping with submissions and accessing funding.

For further information on the project please contact:  
Amity Community Services on (08) 8944 6565.



### *Heavy Metal: the social meaning of petrol sniffing in Australia* by Maggie Brady

Dr Maggie Brady has very generously donated 16 copies of her book *Heavy Metal* to the NIIS to distribute to our readers. *Heavy Metal* looks at petrol sniffing in a number of Aboriginal communities—the history, practice and settings in which it takes place.

While written in 1992, *Heavy Metal* remains a vital reference re-

source and is still cited in major reports about petrol sniffing and inhalant use. This book would be of value to researchers or individuals who are keen to build their collection of Australian inhalant resources.

If you would like a copy (first come, first served) please email Ruth at [info@inhalantsinfo.org.au](mailto:info@inhalantsinfo.org.au)

### WE NEED YOU

If you are part of a community dealing with inhalant misuse then share your story with us. The information you share might be useful for other communities.

### National Inhalants Information Service

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Woden ACT 2606

Phone: 02 6215 9816

Fax: 02 6282 7364

website:

[www.inhalantsinfo.org.au](http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au)

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The NIIS is an initiative of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) - National Drugs Sector Information Service

<http://ndsis.adca.org.au>

## National Inhalants Information Service

# Inhalants Database

The NIIS can supply you with copies of journal articles as well as loaning items including books, CDs, and DVDs. There is no charge for this service. For a full listing of all resources please visit [www.inhalantsinfo.org.au/database](http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au/database). Please email your requests to [info@inhalantsinfo.org.au](mailto:info@inhalantsinfo.org.au)

### Items recently added to the database.

#### SERIES NDLERF

Trifonoff, Allan

**A compendium of alcohol and other drug-related resources for law enforcement in Australia**

Place: Hobart

Publisher: NDLERF

Date: 2008

Web address: <http://www.ndlerf.gov.au/pub/NDLERF%20Compendium%20-%20with%20Abstracts%204%20Dec%202008.pdf>

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Collins, David

**Individual and contextual predictors of inhalant use among 8th graders : a multilevel analysis.**

Volume: 38(3) 2008

Source: Journal of Drug Education

Pages: 193-210

Date: 2008

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Praharaj, Samir Kumar

**Inhalant abuse (typewriter correction fluid) in street children. [Case Report].**

Volume: 2 (4) December 2008

Source: Journal of Addiction Medicine

Pages: 175-177

Date: 2008

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McFarland, Blair

**Opal update**

Volume: 7 (1) January 2009

Source: Of Substance

Pages: 27

Date: 2009

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