

## A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

### *Drug Abuse Alert: Inhalants*

**What are inhalants?** Inhalants are any substance that produce intoxication when intentionally inhaled. Inhalants fall into four major categories: 1) solvents, such as paint thinners, gasoline, and glues; 2) aerosols, such as hair, deodorant, and paint sprays; 3) anesthetics, such as nitrous oxide, which is used as an aerosol propellant in whipped cream; and 4) nitrites (amyl and butyl).

**What are the street names for inhalants?** Amyl nitrite is known as “poppers” or “snappers,” due to the sound the glass capsules make when they are broken open. It is also known as “pearls” and “amys.” Butyl nitrite’s street names are derived from the manufacturer’s brand names when they are sold as room deodorizers: Bolt, Bullet, Climax, Locker Room, Rush, Hardware, Quick Silver, Discorama, Highball, and Thrust. The term “whippets” is used to describe the small metal cannisters of nitrous oxide that are sold as chargers for whipped cream makers.

**How are inhalants used?** Inhalants are most typically “sniffed” or “snorted” directly from the container. Liquid solvents may be poured onto a rag and held over the mouth for “huffing.” Another method of inhalant use is “bagging”--placing the substance into a bag or balloon and inhaling.

**Who uses inhalants?** Inhalants are most commonly used by white and Hispanic youth in their late childhood and early adolescence. According to data from the 1996 national Monitoring the Future survey, 21% of 8th, 19% of 10th, and 17% of 12th graders reported ever using inhalants (excluding nitrites). However, inhalant use is not limited to youth. A 1994 University of Maryland survey found that 8% of undergraduate students had used inhalants in the past year; 4% in the past month.

**What are the effects of inhalant use?** Inhalant users experience effects similar to that of heavy drinking--euphoria, stimulation, and a loss of inhibition. In addition, some users may have temporary sensory and perceptual hallucinations. The high from inhalant use is rapid and short-lived. Physically, inhalants depress the body’s central nervous system, creating short-term effects, such as decreased blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, drowsiness, nausea, and vomiting. Long-term effects of chronic use include short-term memory loss, liver and kidney damage, and permanent brain damage. In addition, any inhalant use--even first time use--may result in sudden death (typically from heart failure).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Inhalant Abuse*, WWW document; URL <http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Inhalants/Inhalants.html> (accessed 7/30/97), Stephen Braunginn, Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources, *Prevention Strategies to Reduce Inhalant Use and Abuse*, WWW document; URL <http://www.uhs.wisc.edu/wch/paper2.htm> (accessed 7/30/97), and National Inhalant Prevention Center, *About Inhalants*, WWW document, URL <http://www.inhalants.org/about.html> (accessed 7/30/97).

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•• 301-403-8329 (voice) •• 301-403-8342 (fax) •• CESAR@cesar.umd.edu (e-mail) ••