**HUFFING OVERVIEW**

"Huffing" and "Sniffing" imply the use of inhalants to get high. Inhaling medicines may be professionally prescribed. But the use of glue, petroleum and cleaning products to obtain a high is dangerous. Household aerosols and cleaning solvents are often used. Poverty stricken street kids sniff glue to overcome their gnawing hunger and other ailments. Kids who are well off may do so just for kicks. Inhalants bring an immediate high or head rush; inhalants can produce extreme mood swings and visual hallucinations.

In the US, inhalant use rose steadily during the 1990s, with 20% of all teenagers reporting using an inhalant at least once in their lives. At the close of the 1990s, inhalant use was highest among 8th graders. (Substance Abuse and mental Health Services Administration)

Here is how the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition warns about inhalants:

Most parents are in the dark regarding the popularity and dangers of inhalant use. But children are quickly discovering that common household products are inexpensive to obtain, easy to hide and the easiest way to get high. According to national surveys, inhaling dangerous products is becoming one of the most widespread problems in the country. It is as popular as marijuana with young people. More than a million people used inhalants to get high in one year.

Inhalant use refers to the intentional breathing of gas or vapors with the purpose of reaching a high. Inhalants are legal, everyday products which do have a useful purpose, but can be misused. You’re probably familiar with many of these substances—paint, glue and others. But you probably don’t know there are more than 1,000 products that are very dangerous when inhaled—things like typewriter correction fluid, air-conditioning refrigerant, felt tip markers, spray paint, air freshener, butane, even cooking spray. (www.inhalants.org)

Slang terms for inhalants include rush, whippets, poppers, snappers, and laughing gas. Inhalants are taken into the body through sniffing or snorting. This may be done by "bagging" (breathing fumes from a plastic bag) or "huffing" breathing through a soaked rag in one’s mouth.

The following information is taken from the U.S. Department Health and Human Services, "About Inhalants" and distributed by the Elks (SAMHSA).
One-time use of inhalants have brought about:

- Suffocation.
- Sudden death.
- Visual hallucinations and severe mood swings.
- Numbness and tingling of both hands and feet.

Prolonged use can result in:

- Brain damage.
- Violent behavior.
- Nervous system damage.
- Dangerous chemical imbalances in the body.
- Involuntary passing of urine or feces.
- Hepatitis.
- Headache, muscle weakness, abdominal pain.
- Decrease or loss of sense of smell.
- Nausea and nosebleeds.
- Irregular heart beat.
- Liver, lung, and kidney impairment.

Inhalants have been shown to be both physically and psychologically addictive. What is important to realize is that one-time-use can kill. Medical experts say death can come in at least five ways:

- Asphyxia—solvent gases can significantly limit available oxygen in air causing breathing to stop.
- Suffocation—typically seen with huffers or sniffers who use bags.
- Choking on vomitus.
- Careless and dangerous behaviors in potentially dangerous settings (for instance, flash fires).
- Sudden sniffing death syndrome, presumably from cardiac arrest.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What would offer as the main reasons students you know might use inhalants?
2. Would the cautions above deter them from doing so?
3. Should the issue of huffing or inhalants be part of public school curriculum? At what grade or grades?
4. If you say no, what would you suggest? If so, how would you suggest it be taught?
5. How would you intervene in the case of two or three 8th graders who are huffing after school a few times a week?
IMPLICATIONS

1. Inhalants are the third most abused substances among 12-14-year-olds in the U.S.—coming after alcohol and tobacco.
2. Since 8th graders represent the largest group of those huffing, education should begin in or before middle school.
3. Respect for all life, respect for our bodies, and responsibility are core values that ought to be specifically taught in homes, places of worship, youth groups, and school.

Dean Borgman cCYS