
A Retailer's Response to Inhalants

Practical advice that's good for your business
and good for your community.

Queensland

A smiling man in a white shirt and teal apron with his arms crossed. The image is partially cut off on the right side, showing only the right half of his face and torso.

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For more information or to download copies of this resource please visit www.inhalantsupply.org

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What is inhalant use?

A small number of people deliberately inhale the vapours from household products in order to feel 'high'. Some do it for fun, others do it as a way of coping with personal problems in their life. This behaviour can contribute to a range of issues for the individual user, their peers, their families and the broader community. It can also cause problems for retailers who stock inhalable products, their staff and their customers.

Responding to inhalant use requires action from health workers, youth services, schools, police, retailers, manufacturers and other community leaders.

This kit has been developed to assist retailers play their part in the community response to inhalant use. By being a part of this response businesses can save money, provide a safer workplace and build their reputation as a responsible retailer.

“By working together,
we can minimise the
harm from inhalant
use and help to build
a better future for the
community.”



What products can be inhaled?

A wide range of products can be inhaled (or 'sniffed') and trends in the types of products being inhaled can change. Here is a list of commonly available products (sometimes referred to as volatile substances) that can be misused.

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other products in your store that can be inhaled - see page 18 for more details.



Solvents

- petrol
- spray paint
- glue
- degreaser
- cleaning products
- paint stripper
- correction fluid



Aerosols

deodorant
spray paint
hairspray
cooking oil



Gases

butane (lighter refill cans, camp stove cartridges)
nitrous oxide (for whipped cream dispensers)

What are the effects of inhalants?

When a person uses an inhalant the chemicals go from their lungs to their brain causing effects almost immediately. The effects are similar to alcohol and will usually wear off quickly once a person stops inhaling. This leads some people to continue sniffing in order to stay intoxicated.

“As well as physical health problems, inhalants can cause social problems. Many of these social problems have impacts on other people, particularly families, and sometimes whole communities can be affected.”



While a person is intoxicated from inhalants, they may feel a range of effects from happy and excited to disorientated and drowsy. Their behaviour might be erratic and some users experience hallucinations. Long term use can result in damage to the brain, particularly in the areas of speech and memory.



Volatile substances are toxic to the body and can slow down the heart rate and breathing of users. Chronic use can result in pneumonia or other respiratory problems.



These substances can affect the heart's rhythm, which means that someone is more likely to have a heart attack when intoxicated (sometimes referred to as 'sudden sniffing death'). This can happen the very first time someone uses inhalants. For this reason, **it is important not to startle or chase someone who is using inhalants.**



People who are intoxicated have a higher risk of accidental injury or death resulting from falls or traffic incidents. They also risk choking or suffocating on plastic bags used to inhale certain products.



As well as these physical health problems, inhalants can cause social problems such as dropping out of school, losing a job, legal issues, relationship breakdown, loss of friends or someone becoming homeless. For some young people inhalant use can damage their spirit and cut them off from culture.



What are the signs that someone might be using inhalants?

“Be conscious of stock that mysteriously ‘disappears’ and find out if it can be sniffed.”

Whilst it can be difficult to determine if a customer is using inhalants, the following list may assist you to recognise some of the common signs.

- behaving similar to someone who is drunk
- appearing dazed, dizzy or disoriented
- chemical smell on clothes, skin or breath
- paint stains on clothes or skin
- slurred or difficult to understand speech
- red, glassy eyes
- unsteady on their feet
- nervous, excited or irritated behaviour

Some people who want to sniff may steal an inhalable product rather than purchase it. Be conscious of stock that mysteriously ‘disappears’ and find out if it can be sniffed. If so, it may need to be locked up or stored behind the counter.

Other signs that a person may be going to use an inhalant include

- asking for specific products that you know can be misused
 - frequent purchases of a product you know can be misused
 - purchasing a large quantity of a product you know can be misused.
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What does the law say?

In Queensland it is against the law to sell a harmful product to someone if you think they are going to inhale or ingest it. This also applies if you think they are going to sell it to someone else who plans to misuse it.

It is also against the law to sell spray paint to anyone under the age of 18.

If you suspect that a customer attempting to purchase spray paint is a minor, you must ask for their ID before proceeding with the sale.

Sellers of spray paint must also display signage at each point of sale stating that they are prohibited from selling the product to minors.

If you sell inhalable products we encourage you to read the excerpt from Section 23 of the “Summary Offences Act 2005” on page 19 of this guide.

Remember, before refusing sale you must have a reasonable belief that the customer is going to misuse the product. Refusing sale on unreasonable grounds like the person’s age (except in the case of spray paint), gender or race could be considered discrimination.

“Refusing sale based on unreasonable grounds like the person’s age (except in the case of spray paint), gender or race could be considered discrimination.”



How do I respond to customers who may be using inhalants?



Calmly explain to the person that it is against the law to sell them the product. Most people will accept this and leave without incident.

Use “we” statements instead of “I” statements. This shows it is not the salesperson’s fault, it is the store and government policy.

Refer to signage that reinforces the store policy.

Offer to get the store manager to explain the policy.

If the person becomes abusive or threatening, consider the safety of staff and other customers. In some cases it may not be safe to refuse sale. If this happens, contact police immediately to report the abusive or threatening behaviour.

Consider training new staff to make sure they are familiar with the policy and appropriate responses.

Consider the placement of inhalants in the store. Keep inhalable products behind the counter or within view of staff.

Display extra signage around the store that reinforces the store policy.

Use ‘dummy’ containers for display purposes.

Discuss any ongoing issues with local police, who may have suggestions on improving store security.

Contact local youth, health and welfare services who might also be responding to inhalant use in your local community.

Remember not to chase or startle customers who may be intoxicated as they are at a greater risk of having a heart attack.

Good for you. Good for your community.

Supplying inhalants responsibly is good for business.

- You will reduce the theft of stock.
- Your staff and customers will feel safer.
- You will build your reputation as a responsible retailer.
- You will be complying with legal requirements.

You are also helping your community.

You are part of a broader community response to inhalant use which involves police, health workers, youth services and product manufacturers.

Together we can reduce the availability of inhalants and the harms experienced by those who use them.

“By being a responsible retailer you are helping your community in its response to inhalant use.”



Examples of inhalants and their chemical components

Category	Inhalant	Chemicals
Adhesives	Airplane glue	Toluene, ethyl acetate
	Other glues	Toluene, n-hexane, acetone, benzene, methyl chloride, methyl ethyl ketone, methyl butyl ketone
Aerosols	Hair spray	Butane, propane
	Deodorants	Butane, propane
	Spray paint	Butane, propane, fluorocarbons, toluene, Trichloroethylene
	Fabric protector spray	Butane, trichloroethane
	Computer cleaners	Dimethyl ether, butane, propane, n-hexane
	Asthma sprays	Chlorofluorocarbons
Anaesthetics	Gaseous	Nitrous oxide
	Liquid	Halothane, enflurane
	Local	Ethyl chloride
Cleaning agents	Dry cleaners	Tetrachloroethylene, trichloroethane, n-hexane
	Spot removers	Xylene, petroleum distillates, chlorohydrocarbons
	Degreasers	Tetrachloroethylene, trichloroethane, trichloroethylene
	Video head cleaners	Amyl nitrite, butyl nitrite, cyclohexyl nitrite
Solvents	Nail polish removers	Acetone, ethyl acetate, toluene
	Paint remover/thinners	Toluene, methylene chloride, methanol, acetone, ethyl acetate, xylene, Trichloroethylene, petroleum distillates
	Correction fluids and thinners	Trichloroethane, trichloroethylene
	Permanent marker pens	Xylene
	Petrol	Benzene, toluene, n-hexane, xylene, possibly lead
Gases	Fuel gas	Butane, propane
	Cigarette lighter fuel	Butane, propane
	Refrigerant	Freon
Food products	Whipped cream aerosols (whippets)	Nitrous oxide
Nitrites	Poppers, fluids, room odorisers	Amyl nitrite, butyl nitrite, cyclohexyl nitrite

Excerpt from the Summary Offences Act 2005

Part 2 Offences

23 Sale of potentially harmful things

(1) A seller must not sell a potentially harmful thing to another person if the seller knows or believes, on reasonable grounds, that the other person—

(a) intends to inhale or ingest the thing; or

(b) intends to sell the thing to another person for inhalation or ingestion whether by that person or someone else.

Maximum penalty

(a) for a first offence—25 penalty units or 3 months imprisonment; or

(b) for a second or later offence—50 penalty units or 1 year's imprisonment.

(2) For the purposes of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991, section

46, a seller is not to be taken to discriminate against a person only because the seller refuses to sell a potentially harmful thing to the person because of subsection (1).

(3) In this section—

potentially harmful thing—

(a) means a thing a person may lawfully possess that is or contains a substance that may be harmful to a person if ingested or inhaled; and

Examples—

- glue
- paint
- a solvent

(b) includes methylated spirits; and

(c) does not include a thing intended by its manufacturer to be inhaled or ingested by a person using it.

23B Sale of spray paint to minors

(1) A seller of spray paint must not sell spray paint to a minor.

Maximum penalty—

(a) for a first offence—140 penalty units; or

(b) for a second offence—280 penalty units; or

(c) for a third or later offence—420 penalty units.

23D Seller of spray paint must display prohibition sign

(1) A seller of spray paint who is an employer must display, as prescribed under a regulation, a prohibition sign at each point of sale at the seller's retail outlet. Maximum penalty—20 penalty units.

**For the full legislation visit
www.legislation.qld.gov.au**

Sources

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Government of Western Australia Drug and Alcohol Office (2007) *Selling Volatile Substances: Information for Retailers* Accessed July 2013 www.dao.health.wa.gov.au

National Health and Medical Research Council (2011) Consensus-based clinical practice guideline for the management of volatile substance use in Australia. Melbourne: National Health and Medical Research Council pp28

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Summary Offences Act (Qld) 2005, Section 23. Accessed July 2013 www.legislation.qld.gov.au

www.inhalantsupply.org

Where can I find more information?

In the event of an emergency, immediately dial “000” and notify the store’s first aid officer and/or manager. Follow basic first aid protocols, including any instructions provided by the “000” operator.

www.inhalantsupply.org

To access this retailers kit online and to order additional copies.

www.inhalantsupply.org

(07) 3837 5621

info@dovetail.org.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

Provides telephone counselling and referral for any person or family member affected by alcohol and other drug use.

1800 177 833

National Inhalants Information Service

This service provides information, research assistance and support for the Australian community, parents and families, teachers, alcohol and other drug workers and other professionals assisting users of volatile substances.

www.inhalantsinfo.org.au

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services

The Queensland State Government funds a range of initiatives which aim to reduce inhalant use and improve community safety. They also have information for retailers.

www.communities.qld.gov.au

Your Local Service Contact



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Dovetail
supporting the youth alcohol and
drug sector in Queensland

www.inhalantsupply.org