

SUPPORT FOR PREVENTING THE MISUSE OF VOLATILE SUBSTANCES



**GOLDFIELDS REGION/
NGAANYATJARRA LANDS**

RETAILERS' KIT



Australian Government



**Government of Western Australia
Drug and Alcohol Office**



**KALGOORLIE-BOULDER CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY INC.**



Code of Conduct

Supply of Volatile Substances

A range of volatile substance products may be used for the purposes of intoxication. **Aerosol spray paints** and **butane gas** products are commonly sought after for misuse and have been responsible for several sudden deaths.

To assist in restricting the sale of these substances, this store will:

- ban the sale of aerosol spray paints to people under the age of 18 years
- ban the sale of portable butane products (such as cigarette lighter refills; butane gas cartridges and disposable cigarette lighters) to minors by asking for photo identification as proof of age
- display these products behind the counter or in locked display cabinets away from the general public
- display signs, preferably adjacent to these products, indicating our right to refuse sales
- use dummy containers for display purposes
- ask about the purpose of frequent or large quantities of these products being purchased
- keep all staff informed of the relevant laws and the potential misuse of these products for the purposes of intoxication.

Under Section 206 of the Western Australian Criminal Code it is against the law to 'supply intoxicants to people likely to abuse them':

A person who sells or supplies an intoxicant to another person in circumstances where the person knows, or where it is reasonable to suspect, that that or another person will use it to become intoxicated is guilty of an offence and is liable to imprisonment for 12 months and a fine of \$12 000.



Government of Western Australia
Drug and Alcohol Office



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What are volatile substances?

Volatile substances (also known as inhalants or solvents) are a range of products that, when vaporised and inhaled, can cause people to feel intoxicated or high similar to being drunk.

Preventing the misuse of volatile substances

Retailers can provide a great service to the community by limiting opportunities for volatile substances to be obtained for the purposes of intoxication. As retailers of volatile substances, you and your staff can play a role in preventing their misuse.

The Code of Conduct has been developed by the Drug and Alcohol Office in partnership with the Retail Traders' Association of WA and the Hardware Association of WA, and made specific to the Goldfields region with the assistance of the Goldfields Volatile Substance Use Working Group in partnership with the Kalgoorlie Boulder Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

This booklet is provided to support the Code of Conduct and provide information to help you:

- identify products that may be misused
- display and sell products in a way that is restrictive or less attractive to inhalant users
- identify potential users and those who may supply to users.

Inhaling volatile substances is a serious social and health problem. When intoxicated, people can hurt themselves or others.

Repeated or long-term use can damage the heart, brain and other vital organs. Sudden death may occur at any time – even the first time a person inhales.

Some adults supply volatile substances to young people because they have been asked to obtain the substance for a young person, or because the young person has threatened them.

The community needs your help. Retailers can provide an important community service by limiting access to volatile substances.

Benefits of the responsible sale of volatile substances

The responsible sale of volatile substances can benefit your business by:

- reducing theft of stock and associated insurance claims
- deterring intoxicated people from entering the store
- ensuring other customers in your store don't feel threatened
- reducing the possibility of violence towards staff and customers
- improving compliance with occupational health and safety standards
- **ensuring** compliance with Section 206 of the WA Criminal Code
- improving your store's standing in the community through being socially responsible and community minded.


What products are used for the purposes of intoxication?

Hundreds of volatile substance products that are readily available through a variety of retail outlets may be purchased for the purposes of intoxication. However, a much smaller number of products is commonly sought out by those who intend to misuse them. The degree of popularity of these products varies according to local trends.

One of the most dangerous volatile substances with respect to the risk of death is **butane**.

Commonly, butane comes in aerosol cans in the form of cigarette lighter refills, disposable cigarette lighters, and butane gas cartridges used for camping stoves. However, the propellant in most aerosols is either butane or other hydrocarbons.

Aerosol spray paints pose a high risk to young people as they are one of the most sought-after substances. Some aerosols containing solvent products are misused for the contents (such as paint), while others (such as cooking oil) are sought for the propellant gas (butane or other hydrocarbons).



Obviously, it is impractical to refuse sales of all volatile substance products. However, it is important to take note if there is a sudden increase in the purchase or theft of the following products:

AEROSOLS

- **Spray paint aerosol cans**
- **Other aerosols** – hairspray, deodorant, cooking oil.

SOLVENTS

- **Glues and adhesives** – super glues, rubber cement
- **Other solvents** – toluene, paint strippers, degreasers, nail polish remover, correction fluid, other cleaning products
- **Petrol**

GASES

- **Butane** – cigarette lighter refill cans, cigarette lighters and portable butane/propane cartridges for camping stoves, soldering irons and flame torches
- **Nitrous oxide** – gas bulbs used for whipped cream dispensers.

This is not a definitive list, as a large number of products is commonly misused. If you are unsure about whether a product can be misused, consult the **Alcohol and Drug Information Service** (see the Contacts section at the end of this booklet) or speak with other retailers in your area.



What are the effects of inhaling volatile substances?

Inhaled vapours are absorbed through the lungs and rapidly reach the brain. Intoxication is similar to that caused by alcohol. The effects of inhaling come quickly and disappear within a few minutes to half an hour. In order to stay intoxicated, a person needs to continue to sniff at regular intervals.

Effects may include:

- depressed breathing and heart rates
- feelings of relaxation, loss of inhibitions
- unsteady gait, slurred speech
- mood swings, erratic behaviour, aggression,
- vomiting
- hallucinations, paranoia, disorientation/confusion
- seizures, loss of consciousness
- death.

What harms are caused by volatile substance misuse?

Volatile substances are poisonous. Long-term use can cause serious damage to the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and brain, particularly the areas of speech and memory.

Harm can also occur from impaired judgment and confusion whilst intoxicated, resulting in accidents and other risk-taking behaviours.



Can sniffing volatile substances cause death?

Inhaling a volatile substance can cause death, even for a first-time user.

Inhaling volatile substances can lead to an overdose, resulting in cardiac arrest. This is because the heart can become oversensitive to adrenalin, which may cause it to beat ineffectively, not cope with exertion, or stop beating. **This is why it is important not to chase or frighten anyone who may be using volatile substances.**

Death can occur as a result of respiratory failure or pneumonia caused by long-term damage to the lungs.

Becoming intoxicated from sniffing volatile substances can lead to death from burns, a car accident, suffocation or suicide.

Who misuses volatile substances?

Volatile substances are misused by both females and males across all social groups and income levels.

Surveys indicate that volatile substance inhalation is usually only a passing phase of experimentation, most common among young teenagers. Generally, volatile substance users are aged 10–35 years, with the main group aged 12–20 years.

Young people who sniff generally try it once or twice then discontinue use. Few become regular or dependent users. However, some continue to use into their 20s and 30s.

Longer-term users often have a wide range of other problems. They may be socially isolated and often use alone.

It is difficult for retailers to identify users by their appearance. What you need to look for are signs of behaviour indicating that people are buying substances to inhale.

What are the signs that a person may be misusing volatile substances?

Retailers are strongly urged to help control volatile substance misuse by knowing what behaviours are associated with sniffing. It can be difficult to identify someone who may be misusing volatile substances. The following are some things you can look for:

Signs of intoxication:

- drunken, intoxicated behaviours (excitable, giggly, manic or aggressive)
- unsteadiness, slurred speech, or other signs similar to drunkenness
- a drowsy, vacant or glazed expression in the eyes
- red eyes, heightened colouring, a rash or sore spots around the mouth or nose
- nervous or anxious behaviour
- confusion or disorientation
- traces or smell of solvents on a person's clothes or breath.

Also be alert to:

- groups of teenagers standing around counters or areas where volatile substance products are displayed
- young people in groups buying volatile substances (when experimenting young people often sniff in small groups, whereas longer-term users are often socially isolated and sniff alone)
- individuals or groups who buy volatile substances frequently, or who come back on the same day to buy a similar product, or who try to make multiple purchases
- requests for particular colours (usually metallic) or numbers of spray cans, glues or cigarette lighter refills that do not conform to the reason for purchase
- several people entering the store together and using distraction techniques to steal products
- purchasers giving the product to others outside the store
- purchase of plastic bags at the same time as glue or other solvent-based products
- unlikely answers to questions as to the reason for the purchase – e.g. spray paint being used to paint a house
- truanting young people (i.e. in school uniform) as truants are more likely to misuse substances than other young people.



What can retailers do?

Most customers purchase volatile substances for legitimate reasons. However, some people purchase them for misuse. The following steps provide a guide to managing the sale of volatile substances in your store:

1. **Identify:** the potential products for misuse and how they are stored and displayed.
2. **Display and storage:** most volatile substances used for the purposes of inhaling are stolen rather than purchased, so it is important that volatile substances are thoughtfully stored. You should apply the Code of Conduct – display spray paints and butane products behind the counter or in locked display cabinets, or use dummy containers for display purposes.
3. **Training staff:** train staff to understand your store policy on volatile substances and their rights and responsibilities. Establish protocols so staff know how to deal with customers who wish to purchase volatile substances whilst ensuring their safety.
4. **Signage:** display signs that indicate your support for the responsible sale of volatile substances and your right to refuse sales of volatile substances (see sign included with this kit).
5. **Consider alternative products:** decide whether it is feasible to replace products containing volatile substances with alternative products that use a natural propellant.
6. **Get involved:** take part in community efforts to address volatile substance misuse and network regularly to stay informed (see the Contacts section at the end of this booklet).

Retailers' legal rights and responsibilities

Section 206 of the Western Australian Criminal Code states:

A person who sells or supplies an intoxicant to another person in circumstances where the person knows, or where it is reasonable to suspect, that that or another person will use it to become intoxicated is guilty of an offence and is liable to imprisonment for 12 months and a fine of \$12 000.

Additionally, in relation to spray paints, section 216 of the Western Australian Criminal Code states that it is an offence to 'sell a graffiti implement to a child'. 'Graffiti implement' specifically includes 'a can of spray paint':

A person who sells a graffiti implement to a child ... is liable:

(a) for a first offence, to a fine of \$6 000;

(b) for a subsequent offence, to a fine of \$12 000.

Under Western Australian legislation, retailers have the right to refuse entry or to not sell a product to a person without specifying a reason.

Retailers are not obligated to sell volatile substances to particular customers and they have a common law right to refuse the sale of their goods when they believe that their refusal is appropriate.

Retailers also have the right to withdraw particular items from sale.

Retailers should err on the side of caution with regard to complying with the Criminal Code provision that prohibits supplying intoxicants to people likely to misuse them. The Criminal Code puts the responsibility onto the retailer to decide whether a buyer may be intending to inhale the product or sell or supply it to someone else. It also provides a reason for the retailer to refuse sales. This approach is similar to the 'Responsible sale of alcohol' legislation for licensed premises and for pharmacies selling some restricted products.

Requesting an individual to leave your store

A retailer has the right to ask any individual to leave the store, particularly if the individual appears to be behaving unusually or has been known to steal from the shop in the past.

Retailers also have the right to refuse entry to their store, if they have reason to believe from past behaviour that the person may steal volatile substances once inside.



Can I be prosecuted for refusing to sell volatile substances to customers?

The store and staff are protected from complaints of discrimination if refusal to sell or permit store entry is based on knowledge or suspicion that the person may use volatile substances for harmful purposes or sell or supply to another person.

Suggested procedure for dealing with customers who you suspect may be misusing volatile substances

Remain calm and friendly. It is best not to argue with the customer. Restate firmly the company and government policy. Most customers will accept this approach and leave the store.

Use 'we' not 'I'. Don't take direct responsibility for this policy. Telling a customer, "We can't sell you this product," indicates that it is not your fault, but a management or government decision. This makes it harder for the purchaser to blame an individual sales person.

Don't engage in further dialogue. Once the refusal option is chosen, do not enter into further dialogue with the customer apart from repeating the refusal.

Retailers have an obligation to ensure a safe workplace for their staff and customers. It is best not to refuse sale if there is any threat or fear of violence. If at any stage you believe that somebody could be injured because you have refused to sell a product, then comply with their wishes and call the manager or the police.

If a customer appears intoxicated, exercise caution and remember safety of all customers and staff is the first priority. It may be best to refuse to allow intoxicated persons on to the store premises. This will not incur complaints of discrimination because the reason for refusal of entry is due to the person's intoxication, not because of their age, race or gender.

What to do in an emergency

- Call for your designated first aid officer and/or the manager
- **If unconscious**, lay the person on their side and clear their airway
- Call for an ambulance (000).

Contacts

For further information or advice

The Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS), a 24-hour drug and alcohol counselling and information service..... (toll free) **1800 198 024**

Local contacts

Population Health – Regional Alcohol and Other Drug Coordinator**9080 8200**

For volatile substance related police assistance

Police **131 444**

For emergencies

Ambulance or police**000**



Notes:

