

# INHALANTS/SOLVENTS

The terms inhalants and solvents are often used interchangeably. This section was previously entitled Solvents. The change to Inhalants addresses a small technical difference. The term inhalant is more general as it refers to any substance which is inhaled for its psycho-active effects. Most inhalants are volatile solvents, i.e. liquids that change to gas with immediately when exposed to air.

## Use

The 2003 student survey indicates that about 3% of Toronto students inhaled glue during the past year. This estimate is down slightly from the 2001 survey (5%), and is similar to the low levels found in the past. About 8% of students report inhaling other solvents, such as gasoline and nail polish remover. This rate is higher than those found over a decade ago (1%-2%). It is also be noted that glue and other solvents are most popular among the youngest students surveyed, unlike the general pattern seen for other drugs. This is likely due to their accessibility.

According to the 2004 Youthlink survey, 10% of street youth use inhalants at least once per month. This finding is consistent with those of the and 2% reported use once or twice per month. A 1992 survey of Toronto street youth found that 26% had inhaled solvents in their lifetime, and 8% did so during the year before the study. It should also be noted that 39% of those who indicated use of inhalants in this last study indicated that these substances presented a major problem, second only to crack cocaine

One particular category of inhalants currently popular in gay clubs, among other venues, is "Poppers"<sup>54</sup>. According to the 2004 report of the AIDS Committee of Toronto, approximately 23% of men recently surveyed in the 'gay club scene' indicated they use poppers from time to time. Eight percent of those questioned said they had used poppers at the last club event they had attended.

*Poppers drugs are any of a variety of physiological-effect chemicals.*

*Generally they are some sort of n-nitrate compound, with Amyl-, Butyl- and Isobutyl-Nitrates the most common. All of these substances cause the same effects, as it is the nitrate portion of the molecules that produces the physical effects. The predominant one is the relaxation of all the muscles in the body. This explains why these drugs are so popular among gay men; they facilitate anal intercourse. One of the related effects is vasodilation, or relaxation of blood vessels. This gives the user a warm sensation and causes a "head rush" as large amounts of oxygen-rich blood rush through the brain. The increase in oxygen also leads to a sudden intensification of current positive emotions, thus increasing one's lust and lack of inhibition.*

*Poppers are sometimes packaged as video head cleaners in order to meet legal requirements, but it is questionable as to whether they are useful for this task. Nitrates are packaged and sold as heart medication in tiny glass bottles. When the small container is "popped" the vapours may be inhaled.<sup>54</sup>*

## Treatment Data

Requests for the treatment of problems related to abuse of solvents, or inhalants, as they are labeled by DART, are extremely low. According to the most recently obtained data from Toronto, only 6 inquiries regarding inhalant-related problems were received in 2001-2002, representing only .2% of all inquiries received; these numbers fell further to 3 inquiries, or .1% of the total for 2002-2003.

Although often not conceived of as "drugs", inhalants can be highly dangerous. The following is taken from [www.erowid.org](http://www.erowid.org), generally a non-alarmist, harm reduction oriented website on drug use.

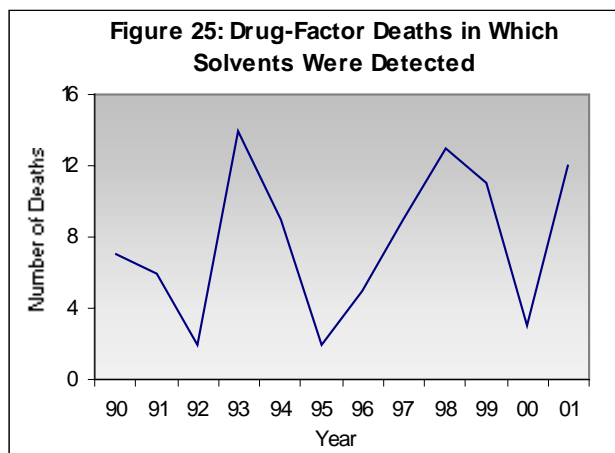
**WARNING:** "Our understanding of the literature is that there is no such thing as safe use of most volatile solvents, aerosols or other street inhalants: Their psychoactive effects are inseparable from nerve and organ damage. We have chosen to include information on inhalants in order to help document their real world use, but the inclusion of this information is not intended to imply that they are anything but dangerous."

directly quoted from ---www.erowid.org

## D rug-Related Deaths

Solvents were detected in 11(7%) of 150 individuals dying from drug-related causes in 1999, (2%) of 119 individuals in 2000, and 12 (11%) of the 106 drug-related decedents in 2001. This lies within the observed range of between 2 and 14 solvent-related deaths annually since 1990.

The lethality studies for 1999 and 2000 indicate solvents were lethal alone in 7 (64%), and 3 (100%) respectively of the cases in which they were observed. The findings of 2001 deviate slightly, with solvents lethal alone in 3 (25%) of the cases in which they were detected. These drugs contributed to a lethal combination in 1 (9%) and 3 (25%) cases in 1999 and 2001 respectively and were not lethal in the remaining 3 cases (27%) in 1999 and 6 cases (50%) in 2001.



In terms of gender, solvent-related deaths occurred in 7 (64%) males in 1999, 2 (67%) males in 2000, and 7 (58%) males in 2001. Again, this drug appears somewhat more popular for males than females, but the differential is not as great as for many other drugs of abuse. The age ranges showed little variation over the three year period; they were 26-68 years in 1999, 26-61 years in 2000 and 18-77 years in 2001 while the median ages were 49,42 and 45 respectively.

" The abuse of inhalants is widespread in the United States; however, it may be underreported because law enforcement officials and healthcare providers are often unfamiliar with the signs of inhalant abuse.

Abusers, primarily adolescents, inhale chemical vapours from a variety of substances, many of which are common household products. These young people abuse inhalants in order to obtain a euphoric effect and are often unaware of the potential risks, which include brain damage and death; some adults also abuse inhalants, particularly nitrites. Adult abusers often inhale substances in order to enhance their sexual experiences."

**U.S. Dept. of Justice, Intelligence Brief, Huffing, The Use of Inhalants, November, 2001.**