The following points for consideration on the portrayal of inhalant use and addiction were created as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not intended to limit the creative process.

**Inhalant Abuse:**

Unless a character’s inhalant abuse truly reveals something important about the character, consider other unique behaviors that might convey the same information. Avoid using inhalant abuse as a glamorous or socially acceptable or normal behavior. Also, try to show abuse with the negative consequences that might accompany such use.

When making creative decisions about the behavior of a character, bear in mind that young people might view inhalant abuse in entertainment as a kind of role modeling. Will others, especially young people want to emulate the behavior of your character?

Consider the manner of portrayal and the probable audience for your production, as well as the potential that graphic portrayal of use and related paraphernalia can inadvertently serve as instructional for young people, if they are your primary audience.

Legal products that can be abused as an inhalant are frequently items that can be easily found by young people in the average household, tool shed, garage, or school (see Fact Sheet). Unless there is a specific point related to inhalant abuse, try to avoid having characters in household, school, workplace, farm, retail, or other settings leaving potentially inhalable products where they can be found and possibly abused by children.

Bear in mind that inhalant abuse can suppress hunger, and many abusers suffer from severe and unhealthy weight loss. While it is important from the standpoint of realism to show this consequence where appropriate, try not to do so in a way that suggests that there is a benefit to abusing household products or other inhalants as a means of dieting.

While it was once believed that the majority of inhalant abuse was limited to low socioeconomic groups of Hispanic decent, this is a misconception that should not be perpetuated. Consider your creative choices carefully to reflect the reality that inhalant abuse cuts across all ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

Because inhalants are contained in common household products, keep in mind that there is a great deal of denial and lack of awareness concerning availability and ready access by young people.

Particularly in Texas and other border states, gang-related graffiti often denotes inhalant abuse of various types. Since different chemicals
affect the mind and body in different ways, certain groups of people abuse particular kinds of products to achieve particular kinds of highs.

Inhalant abuse may serve as an introduction to a lifestyle for young children who eventually turn to other drugs. Consider the age of your characters when choosing to involve them in inhalant abuse.

Inhalant abuse-prevention billboards can be used as a location set piece.

The use of educational posters in scenes can send a subtle inhalant-prevention message in such places as police stations, hospitals, and schools. (For more information, please go on www.eiconline.org.)

A number of warning signs can be used in combination as indicators that a character might be an inhalant abuser, including:

1. Persistent drunken appearance, slurred speech, and bloodshot eyes, without the accompanying smell of alcohol.
2. Chemical smell on breath, skin, and clothing.
3. Severe and sudden weight loss.
4. Rashes or sores around the mouth or nose caused by the harsh chemicals in abused products.
5. Flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea, runny nose, coughing, or loss of consciousness.

6. Lack of attention or the ability to concentrate, difficulty in staying awake, or decline in school or job performance.
7. Appearance of a stash of inhalant products in the bathroom or bedroom, soda cans that contain something other than soda, plastic bags, rags, and old socks that smell of chemicals.

Health Consequences

Where possible, try to portray the health and social consequences of inhalant abuse:

Hearing loss: toluene (paint sprays, glues, dewaxers) and trichloroethylene (cleaning fluids, correction fluids).

Peripheral neuropathies or limb spasms: hexane (glues, gasoline) and nitrous oxide (whipping cream, gas cylinders).

Central nervous system or brain damage: toluene (paint sprays, glues, dewaxers).

Bone marrow damage: benzene (gasoline).

Liver and kidney damage: toluene-containing substances and chlorinated hydrocarbons (correction fluids, dry cleaning fluids).

Blood oxygen depletion: organic nitrites (poppers, bold, and rush) and methylene chloride (varnish removers, paint thinners).

Any and all inhalants, if inhaled for the purposes of getting high, can cause death by suffocation, cardiac arrest, or accident, even from first-time use.
Inhalants

Fact Sheet

Overview

Inhalants are breathable chemical vapors that produce psychoactive (mind-altering) effects. Although people are exposed to volatile solvents and other inhalants in the home and the work place, many do not think of inhalable substances as drugs because most were never intended for such use.\(^1\)

The abuse of inhalants is often erroneously perceived by the general public as a stepchild in drug prevention. It is not viewed in the same high-risk category as other drugs such as alcohol, cocaine, and heroin. Some people tend to view inhalant sniffing, snorting, bagging (fumes inhaled from a plastic bag), or huffing (inhalant-soaked rag in the mouth) as a kind of youthful fad equated with youthful experiments with cigarettes.\(^2\) Inhalant abuse, however, can directly induce heart failure and death. Research suggests that chronic or long-term inhalant abusers are among the most difficult to treat and they may experience multiple psychological and social problems.\(^3\)

Inhalants fall into three categories:\(^4\)

1. **Volatile Solvent Liquids:**
   - Industrial and household solvents and solvent-containing products (paint thinners or solvents; degreasers such as dry-cleaning fluids and spot removers; gasoline and lighter fuels; glues and rubber cements; nail polish removers and shoe polishes; and cleaning fluids).

2. **Volatile Gases:**
   - Gases used in household or commercial products. Igniting exhaled gases is called torching or fire breathing (butane lighters, propane tanks, whipped cream or cheese spread aerosols or dispensers, refrigerant gases).
   - Household aerosol propellants and associated solvents (spray paints and shoe shine sprays containing toluene, known as Texas Shoe Shine; hair or deodorant sprays, fabric protector sprays, air fresheners, analgesic or asthma sprays).
   - Medical anesthetic gases (ether, chloroform, and halothane; nitrous oxide—laughing gas-filled balloons or plastic bags called Whippets, sometimes sold illicitly to teens at outdoor events and on the streets).

3. **Nitrite Room Odorizers (aliphatic nitrites):**
   - Cycohexyl nitrite (available to general public).
   - Amyl nitrites such as Poppers and Snappers (available by prescription).
   - Butyl nitrites such as Bolt, Bullet, Climax, Locker Room, and Rush
(illegal substances, although products using chemical variants are still sold). Although different in makeup, nearly all abused inhalants produce effects similar to anesthetics, which act to slow the body’s functions. When inhaled through the nose or mouth into the lungs in sufficient concentrations, inhalants can cause intoxicating effects. Intoxication can last only a few minutes or several hours if inhalants are taken repeatedly. Initially, users may feel slightly stimulated; with successive inhalations, they may feel less inhibited and less in control; finally, a user can lose consciousness.\(^1\) Sniffing highly concentrated amounts of the chemicals in solvents or aerosol sprays can directly induce heart failure and death. This is especially common with the abuse of fluorocarbons and butane-type gases. By starving the body of oxygen or forcing the heart to beat more rapidly and erratically, inhalants can cause the user to undergo cardiac arrest (known as sudden sniffing death).

High concentrations of inhalants also cause death from suffocation by displacing oxygen in the lungs and then in the central nervous system so that breathing ceases.\(^6\)

Death from inhalants usually is caused by a very high concentration of fumes. Deliberately inhaling from an attached paper or plastic bag or in a closed area greatly increases the chances of suffocation. Even when using aerosol or volatile products for their legitimate purposes (i.e., painting, cleaning, etc.), it is wise to do so in a well-ventilated room or outdoors.\(^7\)

A 1986 study of chronic abusers of spray paints found that after 1 month of abstinence from sniffing the paint, 65 percent still had damaged nervous systems. Such damage can lead to impaired perception, reasoning, and memory, as well as defective muscular coordination and, eventually, dementia.\(^8\)

Prevalence:

Initial use of inhalants usually starts early. Some young people may use inhalants as a cheap, accessible substitute for alcohol. They can be purchased legally in retail stores in a variety of seemingly harmless products. As a result, young inhalers don’t face the drug procurement obstacles that confront abusers of other drugs. Research suggests that chronic or long-term abusers are among the most difficult to treat and they may experience multiple psychological and social problems.\(^9\)

In 2009, 2.1 million Americans age 12 and older had abused inhalants. Source: *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration Web Site). The NIDA-funded 2010 Monitoring the Future Study showed that 8.1% of 8th graders, 5.7% of 10th graders, and 3.6% of 12th graders had abused inhalants at least once in the year prior to being surveyed.

Data on the prevalence of inhalant abuse are difficult to obtain for a number of reasons, and information which does exist may underemphasize the severity of the situation. This places inhalants as the fourth most tried substance after alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana among adolescents. Solvent users tend to experiment with and ultimately move on to other drugs. It is often held in low regard by older adolescents, who may consider it unsophisticated, although college-age and older adults are the primary abusers of butane and nitrous oxide.\(^10\)

Inhalants were a factor in over 500 deaths in the U.S. between ’96 and ’99.
Some researchers warn that doctors and emergency medical personnel are not adequately trained to recognize and report symptoms of inhalant abuse.¹³

Damage from long-term use of inhalants can slow or stop nerve cell activity in some parts of the brain. This might happen in the frontal cortex, the part of the brain that solves complex problems and plans ahead. Inhalants that get into the brain’s cerebellum, which controls movement and coordination, can cause the person to move more slowly or clumsily.¹⁴

Sources:
Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues

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Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.
www.eiconline.org