

# **VS** Volatile Substances **FOCUS**

**Scotland**

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## National publicity on refill sales ban expected later this year

**PUBLICITY materials reminding shopkeepers and young customers of the ban on butane gas lighter refills to the under-18s are to be rolled out across Scotland sometime later this year.**

The Scottish Executive's short-term working group - set up to look at the scope for extending a successful pilot publicity scheme in Fife last year - has agreed that it should be extended nationally, subject to final approval by Deputy Justice Minister Hugh Henry.

They have also agreed that the posters, leaflet and window sticker materials used in the Fife pilot should be used across Scotland. The material was produced by Know The Score in partnership with Re-Solv, the national charity campaigning against solvent use.

The working group - Drew Peden from the Executive's Substance Misuse Division; Fiona Moriarty of Scottish Retailers Federation; Ralph MacGregor, Scottish Development Officer for Re-Solv; Gillian Woods of the Scottish Drugs Enforcement Agency; Geoff Bates, of Fife Trading Standards and, James Egan and Susan Dean of Scottish Drugs Forum - have met twice since April.

No firm date has been set for the launch of the roll-out because it was agreed that it would be best to schedule it after the Lord Advocate's much-awaited decision on the future of test purchasing as a means to help convict rogue traders who sell cigarettes to under-age smokers.

Test-purchasing is not illegal in Scotland but Scottish courts will not accept the use of evidence from "undercover" shoppers to assist in the prosecution of retailers who defy the ban.

The hope is that if the Lord Advocate agrees to make test-purchasing evidence admissible in court, this will set a precedent for use when trying to prosecute retailers involved in selling other age-restricted products including butane gas lighter refills.

Meanwhile, talks are underway on how best to distribute the material across Scotland.

Latest figures (2002) for VS deaths in the UK are expected to be published later this month on [www.vsareport.org](http://www.vsareport.org). St George's Hospital Medical School, part of the University of London, has been monitoring trends in deaths associated with the abuse of gas fuels, aerosols, glues and other solvent based products since 1983.

## Perth events to raise VSA awareness among workers

**NHS Tayside, Perth and Kinross Council and Perth and Kinross Drugs and Alcohol Team are holding two seminars in Perth on 31 August to heighten awareness of volatile substance problems in young people and children.**

The seminars have been designed for those coming into contact or working with young people and children in the community, in education or youth work settings, in childcare services or in voluntary groups. It is also for people whose employment may mean they are in a position to spot the signs of VSA.

The seminars will provide the opportunity to:

- Share the latest thinking on VSA
- Discuss and influence local responses to VSA
- Exchange ideas and identify opportunities for local action.

The seminars will take place between 1pm - 4pm at Murray Royal Hospital, Perth and between 6pm - 9pm Goodlyburn Primary School, Perth. To book a free place at either of these seminars please contact Fiona Mackay, P&K DAAT. Fiona's email is : [FMacKay@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:FMacKay@pkc.gov.uk)

## VS research a possibility in future, says EIU

**RESEARCH on solvent use may be considered sometime in the future by the Scottish Executive.**

That's the message from the Effective Intervention Unit in its document outlining the programme of drug misuse research that the Executive will support and fund over the next three years.

In its publication, Drug Misuse Research Programme 2004-2007, published on 7 June, the EIU states that the programme has previously, and will continue to, concentrate on the misuse of illicit drugs.

"However, research on the misuse of solvents and prescription drugs may also be considered under the remit of the Research Programme in future," it adds.

[www.drugmisuse.isdsotland.org](http://www.drugmisuse.isdsotland.org)

### **VS Focus**

**VS Focus** is a quarterly publication, produced by the Scottish Drugs Forum with the aim of providing information updates and other news about volatile substance use in Scotland.

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## The industry's efforts to tackle VSA

**by Sarah Ross, British Aerosol  
Manufacturers' Association**

**The British Aerosol Manufacturers' Association has worked for over 30 years with experts and charities in the field of VSA to try and reduce the abuse of aerosols and the number of fatalities associated with it.**

There is still a lot to be learned about the practice of VSA. But there is one thing that is certain – there is no single way of tackling the problem. Each approach is one cog in the wheel, one piece of the jigsaw. For this reason British Association of Aerosol Manufacturers (BAMA) has been involved in initiatives on many fronts.

Most people will by now be familiar with the SACKI label (Solvent Abuse Can Kill Instantly) that appears on most aerosols and some other abusable products.

The label came about as a result of a recommendation from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs that a clear warning of the dangers should be put on the packs. The original wording that had been inherited from the US (*Intentional misuse by deliberately concentrating and inhaling the contents can be harmful or fatal*) proved to be unintelligible. When asked what they thought it meant many young people attributed concentration to thinking hard and none made the link to VSA. So, with government funding, research generated the SACKI label that proved understandable to children and parents alike.

Concerns that the label would highlight abusable products were counteracted by work with young people that showed a very high awareness of what to sniff, whilst adults/parents remained in the dark.

Labelling is one approach, but the question we are sometimes asked is 'Can aerosols be made unabusable?' The simple answer is no, if it could be done someone would have done it by now. But I expect that someone said something similar when asked if phones could be made portable.

So a couple of years ago some aerosol and VSA experts gathered together to brainstorm the problem. No technical boundaries were laid down. What was important was - would they be effective?

Ultimately the ideas fell into 4 categories: a spray restricted by time, a mechanism for detecting if a person had been sniffing, an aerosol that could not be sniffed upside down and the addition of a bad tasting/smelling additive.

When tested with professionals and chronic sniffers, only the last one on the list was seen as being a potential deterrent and then only with experimental/first time sniffers. There was concern that the others would all lead to more dangerous behaviour. Work with experimentalists is needed before it can go any further and there are considerable ethical and practical issues to be overcome with any such initiative.

In addition, BAMA works with groups on educational fronts and is looking forward eagerly to the possible establishment of a national stakeholder forum where groups involved with VSA can pool their expertise and move forward in a co-ordinated way.

We need to learn from each other and from overseas projects until we can be sure that all our individual efforts are being targeted and used to the best effect.