

## **April 2006**

Spring Greetings to everyone! We hope this month finds everyone happy and healthy and patiently awaiting the warm weather. This month we thought we would address a potentially serious and apparently ongoing problem in our society and one that is apparently increasing in popularity in our area. We are referring to Huffing. We have talked about this problem in past meetings but in light of recent events, we thought it was time for a little refresher.

Last month in Wyocena, Columbia County authorities made arrests for violations of a new law recently enacted, which has been commonly referred to as "Aaron's Law." The law's nickname was taken from a Door County youngster who died in 2001 while inhaling butane. This legislation makes it illegal to intentionally abuse or possess with the intent to abuse a "hazardous substance," which is defined quite specifically by state statute. The abuse of the "hazardous substance" which the law refers to basically correlates to what we commonly refer to as "Huffing." It is believed that Columbia County will be the first in the State to attempt to enforce and prosecute a violation of this law. Violations of abusing or possessing Hazardous Substances with the intent to abuse them are misdemeanors but distribution or possession with the intent to distribute Hazardous Substances with the knowledge that they will be abused are felonies.

The problem with Huffing is that the chemicals used by people (usually teens but more instances of adults are occurring) to induce their altered states are often found in common household products. Common items used are solvents such as correction fluid and felt-tip markers; aerosols such as cooking sprays and spray paint (silver and gold spray paints are most popular); and gases such as butane and nitrous oxide. Another group of Huffing products are specifically referred to as "Nitrites" because of the active chemicals in them such as amyl nitrite and butyl nitrite, but you would probably hear your kids call them "Poppers." This is because the chemicals are often (but not always) contained in small capsules which need to be snapped or "popped" open to release the vapors for use. These are mainly marketed and often used for enhanced sexual experiences but can also be very dangerous when misused.

The short-term effects of most of these products are very similar to alcohol intoxication, but the long-term effects can be very damaging to the brain, liver, kidneys, lungs and heart. Another definite concern about Huffing is the very real possibility of instant death, even for a first-time user. Huffing causes a euphoric state often due to displacement of oxygen in the blood,

lungs and brain, but sometimes certain chemicals used can stop the user's heart nearly instantly or cause grand mal seizures.

Huffing can be (and usually is) accomplished by sniffing or snorting chemical vapors directly from open containers, saturated rags or plastic bags. However, due to increasing educational efforts and legislation, Huffers have recently been spraying aerosols directly into their mouths or noses and/or pouring inhalants onto their collars, sleeves or shirt cuffs and sniffing the vapors over a period of time. This often allows abusers to engage in Huffing while in a public setting, such as during break periods or while in class at school. Another way of avoiding detection of Huffing is to pour or spray the chemicals into a soda can or balloon and then sniff the vapors from it.

Obviously, this is and should be an issue of very great concern. Long gone are the days where we can crack wise about someone "sniffing a little too much airplane glue!" Like everything else in our society, we seem to have taken a once rare and often isolated phenomenon and abused it to the point where we are now facing a very real public health issue. Fortunately, you as parents can assist us in law enforcement in combating this problem and to that end, avoid further medical and legal complications from this issue. Hopefully with this information we've provided, you can now monitor your children's daily habits more closely and be able to identify whether or not your child is engaging in Huffing. Identifying alcohol-like intoxicated behavior without the actual presence of alcohol, odors of solvents or other gases on your child's clothing, and maybe even unidentified stains in your child's clothing if they attempted to wash their clothing after Huffing, should be able to allow you to start a dialogue with your children regarding the dangers, and now illegality, of Huffing. As always, if you have any questions, concerns, or would like assistance with talking to your child about Huffing, please don't hesitate to contact us here at the Fall River Police Department. Also, look for additional resources and information about Huffing and other dangerous drugs in the near future on the Fall River Police Department's website, located at [www.fallriverpd.com](http://www.fallriverpd.com).

Don't forget about the Fall River Easter Egg Hunt, which is scheduled for April 15, 2006, at 10:00am. Let's hope for a nice, sunny day, and we hope to see you there!

Until next month, stay safe and get outside and enjoy the arrival of Spring 2006!

The Fall River Police Department