

Solvents

How they work

Solvents come in glues, cleaning fluids, aerosols, petrol, Tipp-Ex, paint, varnish, nail polish, dyes, fire extinguishers and room fresheners. Solvent names include toluene, benzene, xylene and acetone. Some of these are poisonous, especially benzene which can cause leukemia.

When you sniff them, they come into contact with air, and partly turn into gases or tiny droplets. These gases whizz from your lungs into the blood and quickly into the brain, making you feel out of it for a while. The active chemicals disappear from your blood several hours after the last sniff as the chemicals are broken down in your liver.



What the Law says

Although it is not illegal to sniff solvents, it is illegal to sell them to young people. The Intoxicating Substances Supply Act (1985) made it an offence to supply someone under the age of 18 yrs with a substance known to 'achieve intoxication', ie get you high.

History factoid

The Victorians used to advertise laughing gas nights at the theatre – you could pay to watch sniffers giggling, falling over and fighting. Nowadays we just have Jerry Springer...

Amazing thing about it

Many sniffers end up in hospital not because of the poisonous fumes, but because they set fire to themselves – solvents are very flammable.

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