



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

Guidelines for the Responsible Sale of Premium Unleaded Petrol

**For Retailers Who Stock
Unleaded Opal Fuel and Premium Unleaded
Fuel**

Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program

April 2008

Draft for Comment

Acknowledgements

These Guidelines were developed using material from the Responsible Sale of Solvents – A retailers' kit (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2002).

Proudly supported by:

NPY Women's Council
Ngaanyatjarra Health Service
Tangentyere Council
Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS)

© Commonwealth of Australia 2008.

Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines have been developed for service stations, roadhouses and communities that sell premium unleaded petrol in designated petrol sniffing regions.

What are the guidelines?

The guidelines outline the preferred standards for the responsible sale of premium unleaded petrol, which are:

- Secured bowsers; that are locked when not in use.
- Monitoring and being aware of all sales of premium unleaded petrol and restricting the sale of premium unleaded petrol, in particular; limiting sales in small containers.
- Reporting suspect purchases.

The guidelines are not a legally binding document therefore they do not override retailers' obligations to comply with any relevant State or Territory legislation.

Why is there a need for Guidelines for the Responsible Sale of Premium Unleaded Petrol?

Unleaded *Opal* fuel was introduced in Australia to reduce the availability of regular unleaded fuel (RON 91+). Unleaded *Opal* fuel has proven successful in combating petrol sniffing in remote communities.

At present there is no low-aromatic replacement for premium unleaded fuel (RON 95+). This presents a significant gap in the supply strategy to reduce petrol sniffing. Reducing the availability (supply) of premium unleaded petrol is an important element in reducing petrol sniffing in remote communities and the harm associated with the practice.

These guidelines provide an approach to limiting the unnecessary distribution of premium unleaded fuels in areas where petrol sniffing is an issue.

The Physical Effects of Petrol Sniffing

Petrol sniffing can slow down the heart, brain and breathing; and can cause loss of balance, slurred speech and disorientation - effects similar to being drunk. Regular 'sniffers' can have fits or hallucinations and even black out. Petrol sniffing can cause sneezing, coughing, salivation and red eyes. Long term effects include serious heart, liver and brain damage, loss of control of limbs, speech and memory, quadriplegia or even death.

Sniffers can experience an 'overdose' effect resulting in that person having heart problems or a 'blackout'. The heart can become over sensitive to adrenaline causing it to beat ineffectively and not cope with exertion - it may stop as a result.

Petrol sniffing has also led to injury and death from falls or accidents due to an intoxicated person suffering from agitation, hallucinations, loss of balance or confusion. Death can also occur as a result of respiratory failure or pneumonia caused by long term damage to the lungs.

Other deaths from sniffing that occur during the period of intoxication include getting lost, being burned, having car accidents, suffocation or committing suicide. Petrol sniffing can also cause sudden death. Death can happen at the first attempt or following many attempts.

Trafficking

The trafficking of petrol occurs commonly in remote Australia. Evidence suggests that young people have been taken advantage of by petrol traffickers ranging from extortion through to prostitution.

A special police taskforce, the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID), has been established to combat the trafficking of petrol and other substance in remote communities.

How can I help?

Retailers can provide an important service to their community by, securing bowsers, monitoring and restricting the sale of premium unleaded petrol and reporting suspect purchases to the SAID. Reporting to the SAID can be done anonymously.

The SAID can be contacted on 08 8951 8888 or contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

Securing Bowsers

Taking steps to secure bowsers and requiring people to pay for their premium unleaded purchase up-front can reduce the likelihood of theft or vandalism. It may also act as a deterrent to some traffickers and sniffers.

Monitoring and Restricting the Sale of Premium Unleaded Petrol

You should not restrict the sale of premium unleaded petrol based on age or race. This is in violation of antidiscrimination legislation in most jurisdictions.

Retailers should monitor and be aware of all sales of premium unleaded petrol.

Retailers should pay particular attention to purchases of premium unleaded when it is not sold directly into a vehicle's fuel tank. It is also possible to require that premium unleaded petrol only be sold into car petrol tanks and prohibit the sale of small quantities that are easily moved and able to be used for sniffing.

It is an offence to supply a volatile substance if the seller knows or ought to know that the person intends to inhale it or supply it to a third person for the purpose of inhalation.

Retailers are protected from complaints of discrimination if refusal to sell is based on knowledge or suspicion that the person may use premium unleaded petrol to sniff or to supply to another person to sniff.

Reporting Suspect Purchases to the SAID

In certain circumstances you should report unusual behaviour to the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID).

This might include:

- Anyone who is purchasing premium unleaded petrol often
- Anyone who refuses to provide their details / show ID
- Anyone who acts with aggression

The SAID is located in Alice Springs and is a joint Northern Territory, Western Australian and South Australian Government initiative to combat the trafficking, supply and use of illicit substances. The SAID works closely with police in neighbouring regions, to stop the illegal supply of petrol into remote communities in the cross-border regions. The SAID also engages with local people in some of the issues surrounding substance abuse to educate communities and individuals.

The SAID will accept anonymous reports and can be contacted on 08 8951 8888 or contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000.

Won't they just try other products?

This may occur, however the sale of other products, such as paint, mouthwash and alcohol are now also monitored and restricted. Governments at all levels are continuing to work with the retail sector to manage the sale of products that can be misused.

How can I tell if someone is or has been sniffing petrol?

People who are sniffing petrol require frequent exposure to maintain the high. This means that they will often have a bottle or bag handy, usually secured near the face. There will also be a strong odour of petrol on anyone who has recently been sniffing. People who have been sniffing may also:

- Have red eyes, sores on nose or mouth;
- Be nervous or display anxious behaviour;
- Be drowsy, vacant or have a glazed expression in their eyes;
- Appear drunk by staggering or falling over;
- Be excitable, giggly, manic or aggressive; and
- Provide unlikely answers to questions as to the reason for the purchase.

Does petrol sniffing affect behaviour?

Yes. Volatile substance misuse can cause agitation and hallucinations, both auditory (sound) and visual (pictures, patterns). Sniffers are unlikely to take any notice of anyone when they are still 'high'. The 'high' from sniffing is very fast, occurring in as little as 5-10 minutes and lasting about 2-3 hours. Long term sniffers can suffer mood swings, anxiety and depression and may become aggressive and paranoid (they think everyone is out to get them).

How to respond to customers who may attempt to buy petrol for harmful purposes:

Retailers should develop policies and provide training to staff on how to respond to customers in these situations.

Steps to ensuring your safety and the safety of your customers:

1. Remain calm and friendly.

It's best not to argue with the customer; just restate firmly the company and government policy. Most customers will accept this approach and leave the store.

2. Use 'we' not 'I'.

Don't take direct responsibility for this policy.

Telling a customer: "We can't sell you this product" indicates that it is not your fault, but a management or government decision. This makes it harder for the purchaser to blame the individual sales person.

3. Owners/managers have an obligation to ensure a safe workplace for their staff and customers.

Where violence is or might be an issue, stores need to develop Rapid Response Protocols with staff, owners, management and police.

For example, you could have a code word or phrase to announce over a PA system that would alert all staff to attend the point of sale immediately. This ensures that all staff is present to assist the sales person in escorting a threatening customer safely from the premises.

It is best to have a plan that all staff are aware of, before an issue arises.

4. If a customer appears intoxicated, exercise caution and remember the safety of all customers and staff is the first priority.

It may be best to refuse to allow intoxicated persons on to the store premises.

This will not incur complaints of discrimination because the reason for refusal of entry is due to the person's intoxication, not because of their age, race or gender.

What do I do if a customer becomes agitated?

You should not confront someone who has been sniffing as this may expose you to harm. You should do your best to anticipate danger and avoid confrontation. You may need to contact the police if you feel there is a threat of violence.

What legislation exists?

Most State and Territory Government's now have legislation or plans in place to manage the supply of volatile substances. The following is an overview of various legislation and plans that exists in each State and Territory that may or may not be applicable to you:

- Northern Territory
 - *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005*
- South Australia
 - *Controlled Substances Act 1984*;
- Western Australia
 - *Criminal Code Act Compilation 1913*;
- Queensland
 - *Summary Offences Act 2005*

Note: some communities also have by-laws relating to the use of volatile substances.

Resources

Department of Human Services, 2002. Responsible Sale of Solvents – A retailers' kit. Available: <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/drugs/solvents.htm>