



commission  
for children  
and young people

## Responsible sale of solvents to minimise volatile substance misuse

In the past 18 months, there has been increasing concern over the growth of volatile substance misuse (or chroming) among young people in Queensland. This practice can cause permanent heart, liver, kidney and brain damage, and even death.

As a retailer, you can play a vital role in helping your community address and deal with the problem at a local level.

### **As a retailer, what can I do about volatile substance misuse (VSM)?**

You can help to address the problem of VSM in your community by changing your retail practices to limit access to solvents. You may consider doing this if:

- your store sells products containing solvents which can be used for inhalation
- a significant number of solvents are shoplifted from your store
- your store is in an area where there is a VSM problem
- you notice frequent or large purchases of solvents by particular people
- individuals or groups of young people stand around counters in your store or in areas where solvents are displayed
- you can detect traces of or the smell of solvents on the breath or clothing of customers buying solvents.

### **What can I do to introduce responsible retail practices?':**

1. Identify potential products in your store used for volatile substance misuse (eg. aerosol sprays, paint, lighter refills, glues or correction fluid) and check how they are stored and displayed.
2. Store and display solvents securely - most products used for inhaling are stolen rather than bought, so it is important to store them out of reach, ie.:
  - display solvents where staff can see them, near tills, on high shelves, under or behind the counter, or in locked display cabinets
  - remove solvents from front-of-store displays where they can easily be shoplifted
  - use empty containers for display
  - consider removing solvents from sale completely if restricting their sale or theft results in potential misusers acting aggressively towards staff and customers.
3. Display signs highlighting your commitment to reducing harm caused by volatile substance misuse. See Factsheet 3.
4. Install security cameras or hire store security staff and place signs in your store about the security measures in place. See Factsheet 3.
5. Train staff to understand your store policy on solvents, and their rights and responsibilities regarding their sale. Establish protocols so staff know how to deal with customers who want to purchase solvents or may be planning to steal them.

<sup>1</sup> Victorian Government, *Guidelines for Retailers*

6. Do not advertise 'specials' on the prices of solvents.
7. Consider establishing a mobile phone connection with local police to report suspicious activity in your store. Keep a list of phone numbers for local police and youth/drug workers near the telephone.
8. Take part in community efforts to address VSM and network regularly with other retailers to stay informed about solvent misusers and the products they misuse.<sup>2</sup>
9. Set up a retailers' group in your community and share information (perhaps through a newsletter) about 'good news' stories and retail strategies that work.

### **Can I refuse to sell solvents to people under 18?**

There is currently no legislation in Queensland allowing retailers to refuse to sell solvents to people under 18. A retailer may be liable for discrimination if they do so.

However, retailers may seek an exemption under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* to restrict the sale of solvents for public health or workplace health and safety reasons. The Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission can be contacted on 1300 130 670 for more information.

### **How will adopting responsible retail practices benefit me?**

By limiting access to solvents, you may help address the VSM problem in your community. As a retailer, flow on benefits include<sup>3</sup>:

- reducing the theft of solvents
- deterring intoxicated young people from entering your store
- improving staff safety by better managing the sale of solvents
- ensuring other customers in your store don't feel threatened
- a possible increase in patronage from members of the public who view your retail practices as ethical and socially responsible.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Your community may already have groups in place to address the VSM problem. To find out what is being done in your community, talk to:

- local police
- health/youth workers
- family service officers
- local councillors
- school principals
- other retailers
- Chambers of Commerce.

Strategies to address VSM can be found in the report, *Volatile Substance Misuse in Queensland*. A hard copy is available from the Commission for Children and Young People by phoning 1800 688 275, or it can be accessed on the Commission's website at [http://www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/publications/VSM\\_Report\\_12-9-02.pdf](http://www.childcomm.qld.gov.au/publications/VSM_Report_12-9-02.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Western Australian Drug Abuse Strategy Office, *Western Australian Voluntary Code of Practice for Retailers – Availability of materials used for solvent abuse*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*



#### **General Information**

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