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Contact: Lynne Zoulek
KC STAAR Project Director
641-622-2271
lynne.zoulek@sigourneyschools.com
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“Study Shows Inhalants a Gateway Drug for Many Teens”

More than 17 percent of teens started using drugs by sniffing household products, commonly known as inhalants. That’s according to a new study unveiled this week by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at a press conference by the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC). The event also kicked off National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week.

The study, “Trends in Adolescent Inhalant Use: 2002-2007,” (LINK TO: <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k9/inhalantTrends/inhalantTrends.cfm>) combines data from six years of National Surveys on Drug Use and Health. The data show that consistently, marijuana, prescription drug abuse and inhalants have been the top three drugs used by youth who initiate drug use. Experts said part of the problem is that many young people do not perceive inhalants as dangerous.

“Among youth, perception is reality. When they believe that inhalant use is neither risky nor unacceptable, use of inhalant increases. If parents do not perceive the dangers and their children dismiss them, there will be more tragedy and more youngsters who die from ‘Sudden Sniffing Death’ or become addicted to inhalants,” said Harvey Weiss, NIPC Executive Director.

According to the Monitoring the Future survey by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, youth in eighth grade see many fewer dangers in using inhalants, with the perception of harm among 8th graders at its lowest point since 1991.

During the press briefing, Weiss said the key to preventing and reducing inhalant abuse, is to use a combination of community mobilization with efforts to make it harder for youth to sniff dangerous products. One such effort was announced at the briefing by David Karmol, of the International Code Council, which governs building codes for all states.

Karmol said provisions in the 2009 International Residential Code will help prevent youth from inhaling Freon from outside AC units. AC units have a valve that comes right off and inside, you can find the cooling agent Freon which some people have also used as an inhalant. “The 2009 International Residential Code has been improved with a number of new provisions that can save lives and improve new homes – among them is the provision to require caps to prevent kids from inhalant refrigerants, a risk that many parents are unaware of,” Karmol explained.

It was refrigerant that killed Dana Prothro’s 19-year-old daughter in 2007. Soon after, Prothro joined United Parents to Restrict Open Access to Refrigerant (UPROAR). Thanks to UPROAR’s lobbying efforts, the ICC changed the model code. Now, the guidelines on new building construction now recommend locking caps on outside refrigerant access points to prevent huffing. “We now need the states to incorporate these 2009 model codes into their building codes. This is a crucial fight to prevent deaths and injury due to refrigerant huffing,” Prothro told the audience. Now the group is lobbying states to adopt the model code and urging the ICC to endorse retrofitting of old air conditioning systems.

To learn more about inhalant abuse, or how to get involved in National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week, visit www.inhalants.org.