



What's in Your Cleaning Closet? National Coalition Warns About Deadly Inhalants

Support for the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition

SUMMARY

Harvey J. Weiss and Associates Weiss and Associates created a National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC).

Key Results

The coalition:

- Maintained and promoted a toll-free "800" number (800-269-4237).
- Established National Inhalants and Poison Awareness Week (NIPAW).
- Disseminated education and awareness kits through NIPAW.
- Published a newsletter, *ViewPoint*; distributed information, posters, videos, and public service announcements (PSAs) for print, radio, and television. The mother of basketball star Michael Jordan appeared in a PSA video warning parents about the dangers of inhalant use; about 350 copies of the video were distributed.
- Advanced a national strategy on inhalant prevention.
- NIPAW drew participation from 49 states (except Hawaii) with about 1,400 individuals and organizations involved.
- Through the toll-free number and other outreach efforts, NIPC directly reached more than 57,000 individuals and organizations.
- NIPC received widespread media coverage. Feature stories have appeared in *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, the *Today Show*, *CNN Newsstand*, and National Public Radio's (NPR) *Morning Edition*.
- In order to explore a range of interventions in inhalants, this project established bridges to other substance abuse prevention initiatives supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), including *Fighting Back*®, Join Together, and the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA).

- NIPC established itself as a principal resource for inhalant prevention efforts and information, providing individuals and organizations with information and resources to combat abuse as well as a hotline for those in crisis.

Funding

RWJF supported NIPC with two grants which totaled \$467,344.

THE PROBLEM

Because inhalant abuse typically starts before the teen years, and in many instances precedes the use of alcohol and tobacco, inhalants are considered "gateway" drugs. The magnitude of this problem is large:

- There are an estimated 1,400 common, everyday products that can be misused. These products are found in every home, office, and school.
- By the eighth grade, more than one in five youngsters has experimented with inhalants. Up until the eighth grade, more youth have experimented with inhalants than any other illicit drug, including marijuana, making it the third most popular substance after alcohol and tobacco. Inhalant use rivals all other illicit substances during the high school years, except marijuana.
- Chronic use often leads to permanent damage to the brain and other vital organs and bodily functions.
- Inhalant abuse can be fatal at any time. It produces a phenomenon known as "sudden sniffing death syndrome." Yet, the number of deaths per year is difficult to determine because accurate statistics are not kept for inhalant deaths in the United States, and inhalant deaths are often attributed to other causes. Between 1990 and 1993, an average of 17 inhalant-specific deaths occurred in Texas per year.
- Treatment for chronic users is almost nonexistent, costly, and time-consuming. For chronic users, detox alone may take 40 to 60 days or longer.

The grantee organization is the nonprofit host organization for the Texas Prevention Partnership (TPP), a project funded by the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA). TPP was formed in 1990 to confront what appeared to be a statewide surge in inhalant related deaths and health problems. TCADA commissioned TPP to develop a set of education and referral resources to be used statewide.

TPP began Inhalant Prevention Awareness Week (IPAW) activities in 1992, and by mid-1993, its efforts involved almost 300 communities in Texas and more than 60 groups in 20 other states. As a result of its national networking efforts among the public, voluntary, and industrial sectors, representatives from more than 1,000 communities nationwide

participated in IPAW events, including local schools, media, business, and parent organizations.

Program staff from RWJF who work in the substance abuse area participated in a roundtable discussion on inhalants hosted by TPP in Austin, Texas, in April 1993 in order to learn more about current trends and responses to this form of chemical abuse. At the time, no national organization existed that addressed issues of inhalant abuse.

As a result of the discussions in April 1993, participants agreed that a series of follow-up "roundtable" meetings should be held to create a National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC) to coordinate a national strategy to reduce the impact of inhalant abuse.

THE PROJECT

The initial grant from RWJF (ID# 022729) provided support for TPP to host the roundtable meetings to create the national coalition. Since TCADA funds were earmarked for prevention activities in Texas, RWJF funds would be used to cover the logistical support of these nationally focused meetings, and for limited travel support to participants who would not otherwise be able to attend.

Two follow-up meetings were held in Austin, Texas, in July 1993 and Nashville, Tenn., in January 1994. Attendees represented a cross section of professionals from across the country who articulated their growing concern over the trends they had observed in poison centers, emergency rooms, and treatment facilities.

Participants represented projects funded by RWJF (Join Together, Partnership for a Drug-Free America, CADCA, Street Kids International, American Youth Works, and *Fighting Back*®), federal agencies (the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention [CSAP], the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment [CSAT], and the National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA]), state substance abuse agencies (Michigan, Texas, Illinois, Colorado, and Oregon), and national organizations (Parent-Teacher Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Collaborative and National Family Partnership).

The meetings resulted in an implementation plan for NIPC that included creating a national clearinghouse on inhalant-related research, educational materials, policy development, and a plan for continuation funding.

Following the January 1994 meeting, NIPC activities were primarily funded by the TCADA. Then, in September 1995, TCADA informed all 14 Texas statewide substance abuse prevention programs (including TPP, which ran NIPC) that they were being eliminated, with duties to be taken over by local programs. In July 1996, RWJF awarded a second grant (ID# 028635) to support the continuation of objectives identified in the first grant and NIPC initiatives aimed at reducing the harm caused by inhalant abuse.

The grant had the following specific objectives:

- Promote and assist the formation of community inhalant prevention partnerships.
- Promote and distribute the IPAW kits and materials.
- Involve local and state media.
- Operate a clearinghouse for materials, information, and referrals.
- Maintain the national Inhalant Hotline (800 number: 800-269-4237) that was established by NIPC before the grant to facilitate the creation of a national clearinghouse and referrals for local assistance.
- Host a training conference focused on skill building.

The project was unable to attract enough attendees to hold the training conference.

RESULTS

- **NIPC developed *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Inhalant Abuse*, a public-private venture to address inhalant prevention by getting information to parents.** The S.J. Johnson Wax Corporation, Chemical Specialties Manufacturers Association, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, and the US Consumer Products Safety Commission helped produce the brochure. The first print run was for 150,000 brochures; the project distributed 98,000 brochures. Bulk distribution went to emergency room nurses for distribution through their hospitals, pharmacists, substance abuse programs, women's clubs, pediatricians, PTAs, and schools. NIPC's phone number appeared on the brochure. In conjunction with this effort, the mother of basketball star Michael Jordan appeared in a PSA video warning parents about the dangers of inhalant use. The PSA was unveiled at a news conference in Washington, DC. A video news release was transmitted via satellite to TV stations throughout the country. About 350 PSA videos were distributed.
- **NIPC staff wrote, published, and disseminated four issues of a newsletter, *ViewPoint*, to a total of 155,000 people.** This newsletter was the primary vehicle to get current resources and information to individuals and organizations; providing state-by-state information about current activities, statistics on inhalant use, and stories of interest. Contact names and telephone numbers were included as resources.
- **Directly reached more than 57,000 individuals and organizations through maintaining and promoting a toll-free "800" number (800-269-4237) and workshops.** The office received 9,431 telephone calls and letters requesting information—about 400 a month in the second year. Some of these calls came from parents whose children were using inhalants or who had died from inhalants. More than 25 workshops were held throughout the country, in which approximately 4,100 individuals participated. Each participant received the publication *Inhalants—The Silent Epidemic*, a general information booklet; an inhalant poster; *A Parent's Guide*

to *Preventing Inhalant Abuse* brochure; and the most recent *ViewPoint* newsletter. NIPC materials were reprinted in several hundred TV, radio, and print stories throughout the nation.

- **NIPC established National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week (NIPAW) as a national effort modeled on IPAW in Texas.** Considered the centerpiece of the project's activities, it was designed as a media-based community campaign to mobilize individuals, communities, and states to raise awareness about inhalant use. Approximately 1,700 local coordinators were provided with educational kits (available in both Spanish and English) containing camera-ready art for brochures, posters, newspaper ads, and sample scripts for radio PSAs, and a reel of TV PSAs developed by NIPC and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. NIPAW generally takes place during the third week of March (however, several organizations and the state of Michigan conduct their activities at times more appropriate for them). About 1,400 individuals and organizations participated from every state except Hawaii. For NIPAW, NIPC distributed 350 videos, more than 7,000 posters, more than 200 inhalant-specific K–6 curricula, about 10,700 copies of the brochure *Inhalants—The Silent Epidemic*, and more than 300 copies of the US Department of Education's *Growing Up Drug-Free, A Parents Guide to Prevention*.
- **NIPC worked closely with other RWJF grantees in the substance abuse arena.** NIPC created lines of communication, linking otherwise isolated projects. It added almost 400 individuals from RWJF grantee organizations to its database and mailed them its *ViewPoint* newsletter, including all participants at the CADCA National Rural Summit (ID# 026903). More than 50 organizations received a full information packet, including all grantees in the RWJF national programs, *Fighting Back: Community Initiatives to Reduce Demand for Illegal Drugs and Alcohol*, and *SmokeLess States®: Statewide Tobacco Prevention and Control Initiatives*, and all communities working with Join Together (an organization at Boston University School of Public Health that provides comprehensive assistance to communities engaged in substance abuse initiatives). All projects in the national program, *Healthy Nations®: Reducing Substance Abuse Among Native Americans*, received a general information packet and NIPAW local coordinator's kit. All states participating in the national program, *Reducing Underage Drinking Through Coalitions*, received an NIPC general information packet. All state alliances under the Partnership for a Drug-Free America media campaign (ID#s 016072, 020895, 022753, 023957, and 030248) received the NIPAW local coordinator's kit.
- **In April 1997, NIPC established a website.** During the grant period, the site received more than 24,000 hits. Since the major risk population includes Spanish language cultures and Native Americans, most of the Web site information was translated into Spanish and linked with Spanish language and Native American sites.

Communications

The project held a Washington, D.C., news conference to introduce two inhalant PSAs and *A Parent's Guide to Preventing Inhalant Abuse*. Feature stories on NIPC's efforts have appeared in many major newspapers and magazines, including *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and Ann Landers' daily advice column. The project's focus on television and radio as resources to raise awareness has resulted in stories on *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, ABC and *NBC Nightly News*, *CNN Newsstand*, and NPR's *Morning Edition*. See the [Bibliography](#).

AFTERWARD

The NIPC's main goals for the future are to:

1. Locate sustaining funds in order to keep operating.
2. Continue to raise awareness of the problem of inhalant abuse by disseminating materials and resources on prevention.
3. Expand the number of people in need of information who contact it.
4. Keep the 800-number phone lines open.

NIPC also will continue its international outreach building cooperative relationships with individuals and groups involved with inhalant prevention in Great Britain, Australia, the Middle East, Canada, Mexico, and South and Central America. Prevention efforts in cooperation with major corporations have continued with an eye towards long-term goals of reducing the number of cases of inhalant abuse and continued fund-raising for NIPC's work.

In 14th National Inhalants & Poisons Awareness Week is March 19–25, 2006. The national campaign received funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Brochures and Fact Sheets

Inhalants—The Silent Epidemic. National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, 1997.

A Parent's Guide to Inhalant Prevention. National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, 1997.

Teacher's Guidebook to Inhalant Abuse Prevention. National Inhalant Prevention Coalition, 1997.

Newsletters

ViewPoint. Austin, Texas: National Inhalant Prevention Coalition. Four issues were published between 1996 and 1998. 155,000 copies mailed in total.

Presentations and Testimony

Harvey Weiss, at the Governor's Drug-Free Tennessee Conference, 1997, Nashville, TN.

Harvey Weiss, at the Greater Dallas Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Regional Inhalant Conference, 1997, Dallas.

Harvey Weiss, at the Gateway Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Regional Prevention Conference, 1997, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Harvey Weiss, at the Governor's Drug-Free Tennessee Conference, 1998, Nashville, TN.

Harvey Weiss, at the PARTNERSHIP '98 Community Conference, 1998, Dallas.

Harvey Weiss, at the Gateway Council Regional Prevention Conference, 1998, Wichita Falls, Texas.

Harvey Weiss, at the Alaska Council on Drug Abuse State Conference, 1998, Anchorage, Alaska.

Grantee Websites

www.inhalants.org. Provides information about the NIPC and its services. Austin, Texas: National Inhalant Prevention Coalition. April 1997; average 1,000 viewers per month.

Press Kits and News Releases

"National Inhalants and Poisons Awareness Week (NIPAW) education kits were provided to approximately 1700 local coordinators. These included camera-ready art for brochures, posters, newspaper ads, sample scripts for radio public service

announcements, and a reel of TV public service announcements developed by the NIPC and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America.

Print Coverage

- *USA Today*
- *The New York Times*
- *Chicago Tribune*
- *Parenting Magazine*
- *Fort Worth Star Telegram*

Television Coverage

- *Morning Edition* (NPR)
- *The Today Show* (NBC)
- *CNN Newsstand* (CNN)
- *Good Morning America* (ABC)
- *ABC Nightly News* (ABC)
- *The Sally Jesse Raphael Show* (Syndicated)