

Annual deaths from solvent abuse in the UK rise from 38 to 46

November 16 2012



(Medical Xpress)—Deaths from solvent abuse rose to 46 in 2009 from 38 in 2008, according to a new report on the latest UK figures released

today (Friday 16 November).

The report outlines deaths from volatile substances – solvent-based products such as gas fuels, [aerosols](#), glues, and anaesthetic agents – that occurred in 2009.

In 2009, gas fuels continued to be associated with the majority of deaths, with butane accounting for 34 out of the total 46.

Five deaths in 2009 – up from two in 2008 – were the result of asphyxia associated with the inhalation of [nitrous oxide](#), often known as '[laughing gas](#)'.

In addition to volatile substances, the report outlines deaths related to helium, which as an [inert gas](#) is not classed as a volatile substance. These rose from 26 in 2008 to 46 in 2009, with the majority being classed as suicide caused by [asphyxia](#).

The figures have been revealed today in the latest Trends in Death Associated with Abuse of Volatile Substances report, compiled by the International Centre for Drug (ICDP) Policy at St George's, University of London. Some of the ICDP members who wrote the report are based at the University of Hertfordshire.

The report shows volatile substance-related deaths occurring in 2009 that have been formally investigated. It details where a type of substance is implicated as a cause of death, either on its own or in combination with another substance.

The [report](#) contains information reported by coroners in England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man, as well as procurators fiscal in Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Although there was an overall year-on-year rise from 2008 to 2009, over the last two decades there has been a significant decline in deaths from a peak of 152 in 1990.

Deaths in Scotland were disproportionately high, with 17 in 2009. This compares to 25 in England, three in Northern Ireland and one in Wales.

Volatile substance deaths continue to be more common among males than females, with 34 and 12 deaths respectively.

As in previous years over the last decade, the largest proportion of deaths was of people aged between 30 and 39, with 14 altogether in 2009. This continues a trend of deaths increasing among older people while declining in those under 18.

Professor Hamid Ghodse, director of the ICDP, said: "Although deaths from volatile substances are lower in number than fatalities related to drugs such as opiates and stimulants, they are still an important cause of premature mortality and equal care should be taken in preventive measures.

"It's particularly worrying that psychoactive agents are being newly abused in the recreational scene, for example nitrous oxide. There might be a misconception that nitrous oxide is relatively safe, but its use carries the potential for adverse health consequences and possibly even [death](#). "

More information: www.sgul.ac.uk/research/projects/stance-abuse-deaths/

Provided by St. George's University of London

Citation: Annual deaths from solvent abuse in the UK rise from 38 to 46 (2012, November 16)
retrieved 1 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-11-annual-deaths-solvent-abuse-uk.html>

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