



**NIPC INHALANT PREVENTION UPDATE ALERT:
ITS HELIUM AGAIN !**

August 10th, 2012

The NIPC Inhalant Prevention **UPDATES** and **ALERTs** are the National Inhalant Prevention Coalition's (NIPC) electronic newsletters. They are designed to provide current information, data, research, **call to action alerts**, advocacy and resources to our Partners throughout the world. Please forward to colleagues and post, with attribution, on listservs. If new readers wish to get on this list, contact us. If you have local data and stories or other items to contribute and/or comments and suggestions, please forward.

Chattanooga, TN: Greetings from beautiful Chattanooga to all of our friends and colleagues.

This **UPDATE ALERT:**

- Warns of the dangers of *intentional helium huffing*;
- Focuses on another TV commercial using helium as a gag line;
- Encourages *UPDATE* readers to advocate for removing this ad;
- Encourages parents to ensure helium huffing is not included in school curricula;
- Encourages *UPDATE* readers to get involved in and *support National Recovery Month*; and
- Asks the *NIPC Community* to support the *NIPC* with a contribution.

THOSE DANG VISIGOTHS

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McQFZd9K82g>

What ? Not again ?
Yes, it's true ... again.

Once again *helium* becomes a TV commercial gag line. As in the past the *National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC)* continues to voice its concern about inappropriate commercial messaging that posits that *intentionally huffing helium* is fun and ok. And, once again, we ask your help in urging a change to this portrayal in a *Capital One* credit card commercial.

The first time the *NIPC* overtly expressed concern about intentional helium huffing was an article in our *ViewPoint* newsletter (sent the old fashioned way, *USPS* to only about 9,000 readers) in the mid-1990's. The first time the *NIPC* challenged a TV commercial was in 2000 (this time via the *Internet* to about 11,000 readers). That's how long it's been.

Yes, the *NIPC* has been at this for years. Why ?

- *Helium* is an inert gas that displaces oxygen in the body and can cause disorientation, blackouts and even death; and
- Intentional use or misuse of *helium* for fun or part of a classroom “educational” experience seemingly normalizes it’s misuse – “it’s just *helium*, my parents or other adults (youth pastor, scout leader, science teacher) use it at parties or events ... just for fun, to talk like *Donald Duck* or as a science experiment.”

Intentional helium inhalation can be and is a deadly practice:

- In 2010, in *Florida*, 9 people died huffing helium, according to the *Florida Medical Examiners’ Annual Report* (<http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/Content/getdoc/036671bc-4148-4749-a891-7e3932e0a483/ublications.aspx>); and
- This past February 14 year-old *Ashley Long* died after huffing helium at a party that was “supervised” by an “adult.” This adult (a parent no less) bought the helium for the party so the kids could have fun (it’s just helium, what’s the harm – its just for fun ... right !). For more information about *Ashley*, her parents, *Loriann & Justin Earp*, her family and friends visit www.ashleyshope.org

The first helium huffing commercial the *NIPC* noted was *FedEx’s* helium huffing *Munchkins* during the *2000 Super Bowl*. Although that was seemingly eons ago, the practice continues.

This year a *GEICO Insurance* TV commercial, an on-line game for youngsters, *Gina the Giraffe* and a *MasterCard / Sun Trust* radio ad featured helium huffing. Now come helium huffing *Visigoths* (of all people) in a *Capital One, SPARK* credit card ad (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McQFZd9K82g&feature=autoplay&list=UUyGhGrs-1hA22jX6X850VEQ&playnext=1>). Twelve years ago it was *Munchkins* and now *Visigoths* indicating – gosh, its fun to huff ! (are you listening *Capital One* & your ad agency ?)

This past March, to kickoff the 20th annual *National Inhalants & Poisons Awareness Week (NIPAW)* public health campaign, the *NIPC* held its annual news conference (supported by the *Substance Abuse & Mental Health Administration’s [SAMHSA] Center for Substance Abuse Treatment [CSAT]*) at *DC’s National Press Club*. Its theme was the dangers of helium huffing. Speakers included:

- Gil Kerlikowski (*Director, White House Office of National Drug Policy*);
- David Shurtleff (*acting Deputy Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health*);
- Brian Dyak (*President & CEO, Entertainment Industries Council [and former roommate]*);
- Loriann & Justin Earp (*Ashley Long’s parents*); and
- Harvey Weiss (*Executive Director, NIPC; President, SYNERGIES*)

(And, permeating the room, *Ashley Long’s spirit*.)

Additional background and a sampling of media coverage:

- News release http://www.inhalants.org/12_inhalants_%20press_release.pdf;
- Local Washington, DC news coverage aired at <http://www.wusa9.com/news/article/198833/158/Huffing-Helium-A-Deadly-Game> ; and

- *Dan Jackson*, an intern from the *Chattanooga* area and writing for DC's *Washington Times*, provided excellent coverage in two articles:
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/mar/15/coalition-calls-for-restricting-helium-sales-cites/print/>

The news release and news conference were covered and picked up by media venues throughout the country reaching millions of people – but, once again, a business and their advertising agency missed the point.

After all this media attention, efforts and advocacy by so many and past years' coverage and articles in numerous publications, including *ADWEEK*, and on TV & radio coverage one would think that there would be a greater sensitivity to and appreciation of the threat posed by intentional helium huffing. But those dang *Visigoth's* are so slow to learn and don't get it – not to mention *Capital One Financial Services*, their *Spark* credit card and of course their advertising agency.

Immediately after seeing the ad, with urging and support from many people who contacted *Capital One* about the ad but were ignored, I contacted several *Capital One* personnel about a half a dozen times. Eventually I received a response that the ad's intent was to be funny. Further, *Capital One's* director of public relations campaigns assured me that their advertising team is taking our concerns into consideration (I am not sure what that means other than, best let y'all fill that in). Of course they *appreciated* our concerns.

TAKE ACTION:

Please help with this educational and advocacy effort:

- Contact *Capital One financial services*, ask them to stop airing this *Visigothian* helium huffing ad. Contact your local TV & radio stations and newspapers, educate and enlist their help and support. At *Capital One*, please contact:
 - Tatiana Stead, Vice President, Corporate Communications: tatiana.stead@capitalone.com
 - Chris O'Neill, Director, Digital & Public Relations Campaigns: Chris.ONeill@capitalone.com and
 - Julie Rakes, Capital One Financial Corporation: julie.rakes@capitalone.com ; and
- Contact local school officials to ensure that inhaling helium is not included in school (i.e. science) curricula.

(Don't forget to let us know if you try to contact *Capital One* and what response, if any, you receive.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & INFORMATION:

- *Compressed Gas Association* (www.cganet.com) : The mission of the *CGA* is to promote ever-improving safe, secure, and environmentally responsible manufacture, transportation, storage, transfilling, and disposal of industrial and medical gases and their containers. *CGA* developed a

brief paper articulating many of the dangers of helium misuse: **Inhaling Helium: Party Fun or Deadly Menace?** By Henry G. Wickes, Jr. http://www.cganet.com/N2O/helium_safety.htm ; and

- **Entertainment Industries Council, EIC** (www.eiconline.org), Encouraging the Art of Making a Difference: *EIC's* mission is to lead the entertainment industry in bringing its power and influence to bear on health and social issues. *EIC* promotes the accurate depiction of health and social issues in film, television and music. *EIC's S.E.T. Project* is a media initiative to raise the importance of Science, Engineering and Technology fields among youth. *EIC* has two products dealing specifically with inhalants:
 - One is *Spotlight On*, *EIC's* weekly newsletter that shares information and depiction suggestions on a wide variety of topics, including ADHD, Diabetes, Suicide Prevention, Veteran Concerns, among others. Inhalant abuse *Spotlight On* newsletter, and spotlighting the NIPC news conference is at <http://www.eiconline.org/eic-resources/spotlight-on/spotlight-on-inhalants/>; and
 - The second is *Spotlight on Depiction of Health and Social Issues: A resource encyclopedia for the entertainment industry*. This volume focuses on drug, alcohol and tobacco use and addiction and it's many dimensions <http://www.eiconline.org/eic-resources/publications/national/substance-abuse-depiction-book/>

**NATIONAL RECOVERY MONTH:
Recovery Benefits Everyone:**

September is the 23rd annual *National Recovery Month*. This national observance educates Americans about the facts that addiction treatment and mental health services can enable those with these disorders to live a healthy rewarding life. All the resources needed to join this celebration of recovery are found at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> (*Recovery Month Toolkit* at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Recovery-Month-Kit.aspx>) If you or your organization are conducting local events, please add them to the impressive list of events at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/Community-Events.aspx> or use this link to find and join an event in your community.

WE NEED YOUR HELP: NOW IS THE TIME!

As the years have gone by we've endured significant reductions in funding needed to maintain the *National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC)*. Simultaneously the costs for maintaining this project as well as the demands for our services have increased exponentially. All of our resources are provided at no cost and project income does not all expenses. This year we have provided *NIPC* resources to more than 3,000 individuals who have contacted us and organizations who have contacted and the more than 1,000 people attending workshops and presentations. The *NIPC* distributed almost 20,000 resources including brochures, videos to all requesting assistance plus a 33 page handout to presentation audiences

at no cost (we do ask recipients if they would care to make a voluntary contribution to recover some of our uncovered costs – this past year 69 out of over responded !).

Please help us now by making a *tax-deductible contribution* to us. The *NIPC* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation and contributions are deductible as allowed by law.

We would like to express our appreciation to the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)* for their continuing support and faith in us. We would also like to acknowledge the continuing support of *Falcon Safety Products*.

Wishing you well,

Harvey

Harvey Weiss, Director

National Inhalant Prevention Coalition (NIPC)

318 Lindsay Street

Chattanooga, TN 37402

800/269 - 4237 and 423/265 - 4662

nipc@prismnet.com <http://www.inhalants.org>

PS: *SYNERGIES* (*NIPC's* parent organization) has decided to broaden the *UPDATE's* agenda. Although inhalants will continue to be a focus, we intend to provide additional articles to meet the needs and concerns of our extensive audience (the almost 30,000 people on our listserv). This would include articles on behavioral health, education, social and public health concerns, etc. If anyone has suggestions, let us know. If anyone would like to contribute articles, we welcome you to *SYNERGIES'* effort.

A Project of

SYNERGIES

Effecting Change Together