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# BUTANE ABUSE

# **BUTANE ABUSE**

## **ABSTRACT**

This campaign involves the sale of and misuse of solvents namely butane gas which is widely available at almost all shops which sell domestic items and cigarettes to the local community, The problem addressed is that youths aged between 1.1 and upwards are purchasing solvent based products from shops and sniffing the contents to become intoxicated through it's solvents and propellants and are probably unaware that doing this can cause serious damage or even death.

This problem has evolved through either complaints at the police station or through deaths which have occurred recently in the local area.

Police have responded to the problem with a poster campaign which has involved local schools, local traders, community based police officers, and the trading standards agencies. Posters have been forwarded to over one hundred local schools and shops with a request to display them in a prominent place within the premises close to where the items are being displayed. The posters highlight that youths under the age of sixteen cannot purchase lighter fuels, cigarettes, and lighters and not to attempt to purchase them as they will be refused. The local community based police involved in schools are also visiting schools in the area to give presentations on the dangers of such substances.

The area press office has sent out press releases to the local press agencies highlighting the fact that posters are being placed in the local shops and shop keepers will be prosecuted if they sell these products, Including cigarettes to youths under the age of sixteen.

The, intention of this campaign is to stop the selling of harmful products and prevent youths permanently harming or killing themselves through solvent abuse.

This has been measured through visiting local shops to find out how the community has reacted to the campaign, how many further complaints have been received, how many legal actions have been taken and although not measurable the amount of deaths prevented through the campaign.

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## **DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

This campaign started as a result of complaint from a concerned parent who attended the police station. He stated that his twelve year old son had been sold butane lighter fuel and cigarettes by a local shopkeeper. This came to light after a school teacher looked inside various pupils lockers after having been informed lighter fuel was being purchased locally. She found several cans of fuel in the lockers and decided to inform the parents. A concerned and understandably angry parent then attended the police station to make a complaint.

The shopkeeper in question was visited by police and it immediately became apparent that a serious problem was developing. The shop keeper explained that when youths came to his shop and asked to purchase either cigarettes or butane gas they would become extremely abusive until the products were sold to them, A prosecution was taken against the shopkeeper. This was further supported when a death sadly occurred in the local area after a teenager sniffed from aerosol cans, this occurred after initial proceedings had been instigated. During the 1970's and 80's there became an epidemic of youths sniffing glue based products and many deaths and seriously injured youths were reported. It was now feared that a craze of sniffing aerosols may be starting and that action needed to be taken.

The primary objective was to stop the abuse of butane related products whilst in it's early stages, so preventing any repetition of the 'glue sniffing' craze of the 1980's and it's associated problems of increased criminality of young persons as well as the deaths and illnesses that occurred as a result of such solvent abuse.

The first priority of police was to deal with this problem and prevent an epidemic taking off in the area which until now had been relatively free of this kind of abuse. In an effort to ascertain the ages of those concerned

local retail outlets were questioned. It was identified that shopkeepers were receiving abuse from youths aged between eleven and sixteen when refused the sale of aerosols. The shopkeepers identified that abuse from youths who were refused the sale of such items. It was apparent that the shopkeepers needed support and advice to help with the problem and at the same time make the shop proprietors aware that they were liable to prosecution if they sold these products to under age people.



I decided that this problem could be addressed by tackling it from both the demand and the supply side.

This was done by several means:-

- A poster for shops to make the public aware that the proprietor cannot by law sell these products to youths under sixteen and there is no discretion for the shopkeepers.
- A press release to make the public aware of the dangers of solvent abuse.
- Schools to be made aware of the campaign and posters to be placed on school notice boards.

This was implemented by posters being created in bright colours in order that they could be displayed near to where the items were being sold making the message clear and simple.

They were then forwarded to shops and schools together with an accompanying letter explaining the campaign and outlining the law. On the bottom of the letter was a return slip and prepaid envelope to be signed and returned. A record of those returned was then logged and stored in case prosecutions were forthcoming and they denied knowing the legislation involved.

Area trading standards were informed of the campaign and co-operated in attending shops to investigate complaints. They also contacted police to involve us in one of their schemes to implement ID cards into the area which could assist in our objectives for under sixteen's.

The community based police teams attended schools in the area and gave presentations to youths on the dangers of solvent abuse.

It was also a possibility that if youths were unable to gain easy access to aerosols through retail outlets they may look to their homes to get them. The local press were informed and publicised the campaign making parents aware that these products were widely available within the home environment.

This campaign was created as a local level project due to the fact that abuse was becoming prevalent in the area. It was felt that the main objective was to stop the trend before it became a major problem and many more deaths occurred due to the lack of action. The problem can only be stemmed through educating not only youths but also the parents making them aware that the problem exists.

The campaign is relatively low cost scheme which after initial implementation will only take a small 'amount of time to visit shops ensuring proprietors are aware that they do have the backing of police and to examine the level at which the problem, if one does exist has escalated and if necessary make further changes as required.

Attached are copies of posters sent to shops together with accompanying letters, press releases, trading standards scheme for id cards, and press cuttings from local press.

Since the launch of the scheme police have had a good response from the retailers and the returning of the signed slips.

One retailer has been warned as a result of information from a member of the public that they was supplying butane gas to a youth.

PC291JB David Bishop  
Loughton police Station  
Metropolitan Police

Contact- Superintendent Kay  
Ilford Police Station  
0181-345 2607  
Fax 0181- 345 2776

# Are you under 16?

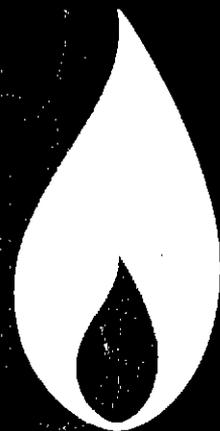
it is against the law for shopkeepers  
to sell you any of the items below -



Lighter Fuel

Cigarettes

Lighters



If you are under 16 please do not attempt to buy  
any of these, because you will be refused

Your reference:

Our reference:

Date: 1 July, 1999



London  
**CR1MESTOPPERS**

Uniting a9aloat crime

## Metropolitan Police Service

**Barkingside Police Station,**  
*Incorporating Woodford, Loughton,  
Chigwell and Waltham Abbey*

**1 High Street  
Barkingside  
Essex IG6 1QB  
Telephone 0181-5514211  
Facsimile 0181-345-3490  
E-Mail [barkingside.police@gtnet.gov.uk](mailto:barkingside.police@gtnet.gov.uk)**

To the proprietor/headteacher

I am writing to all outlets and schools in the area to bring to your attention and invite you to co-operate in a campaign currently being run by the Metropolitan Police and the local trading standards agencies concerning the selling of lighter fuel and cigarettes to youths aged sixteen and under.

This campaign brings to the attention of youths under that age that it is an offence for a shopkeeper to sell certain items to them and for them not to bother asking for these items as they will be refused.

A local shop owner has already been summonsed for offences under the intoxicating substances supplying act and if shops continue to sell to under aged youths many more will follow.

Your co-operation will consist simply of clearly displaying the poster supplied with this letter and not to sell to youths aged or appearing to be under the age of sixteen.

At the base of this letter is a slip which I would be grateful if you could read and sign and then return to myself in the prepaid envelope provided. This will only take a few moments of your time and it could save lives.

The local press will be giving coverage so parents and children should be aware.

The act shopkeepers could be prosecuted under is as follows-

### **INTOXICATING SUBSTANCES (SUPPLY) ACT 1985**

1. It is an offence for a person to supply or offer to supply a substance other than a controlled drug(a) to a person under the age of eighteen whom he knows or has reason to believe , to be under that age, (b) or to a person who is acting on behalf of a person under that age.

The poster states sixteen to cover the age of purchasing cigarettes but the act covers

Trading standards officers and police officers will be making visits to retail outlets to check that these acts are adhered to.

On behalf of the Metropolitan Police I would like to thank you in advance for your co-operation and look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Please do not hesitate to contact or write to myself on the address below if you have any queries.

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I have read the letter sent to me and have understood the intoxicating substances (supply)act 1985.

I would also like to co-operate in this campaign by placing the poster supplied in a prominent position on our notice board(schools) or near to where these products are sold.

Signed

Print name and name of premises \_ \_ \_ \_

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**PC291JB DAVE BISHOP  
LOUGHTON POLICE STATION  
158 HIGH ROAD  
LOUGHTON  
ESSEX  
0181 345 3730**

Your reference:

Our reference:

Date: 19 July, 1999



**PRCU**

Room 418  
Clive House  
Petty France  
.SW1 9HD

**Metropolitan Police Service**

*Ilford* Police Station,  
270-294  
High Road,  
Ilford  
Essex IG1 1 GT

Tel: 0181 345 2607.

Dear Ms Kingswood,

Further to our conversation of today, please find enclosed eight copies of the document entitled BUTANE ABUSE.

If I can assist further, please do not hesitate to contact me.



**Andrew Kay  
Superintendent**