



Comments on the National Inhalant Abuse Taskforce Consultation Paper

‘National Directions on Inhalant Abuse’

by

Australian Institute of Petroleum

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian Institute of Petroleum (AIP) was established in 1976 as a non-profit making industry association. AIP's mission is to promote and assist in the development of a sustainable, internationally competitive petroleum products industry, operating efficiently, economically and safely, and in harmony with the environment and community standards.

These comments have been prepared to assist the National Inhalant Abuse Taskforce in considering the range of issues addressed in their Consultation Paper on National Directions on Inhalant Abuse.

AIP is pleased to present this submission on behalf of the following member companies:

BP Australia Pty Ltd
Caltex Australia Ltd
Mobil Oil Australia Pty Ltd
The Shell Company of Australia Ltd.

Need for holistic response

AIP supports the intent of the paper to approach inhalant abuse in an holistic manner, similar to the drug, set and setting context laid out by D'abbs and McLean (2000).

The downstream petroleum industry, through examples such as BP's Opal, has shown the willingness and commitment to use its capability to contribute to reducing the availability of potential inhalants, but recognises that this role only forms part of the solution to the petrol sniffing problem and needs to be complemented by the sizable efforts of government and communities alike.

AIP has focused its comments on Sections 6.7 and 6.8 of the Consultation Paper. AIP supports the general direction of these sections of the report. However, there are several issues that we would like to draw to your attention

Use of 'bittering' agents

There are concerns about the potential use of bittering agents in fuels that we wish to draw to the attention of the Taskforce.

While AIP member companies are interested in the results of the research work in this area, we believe it is important for the Taskforce to be aware of Australian Government decisions in recent years about the allowable sulfur levels in transport fuels (both petrol and diesel). These details are set out in the Fuel Standards legislation administered by the Department of the Environment and Heritage, and we are happy to provide you with details if required.

Unleaded petrol currently has an allowable sulfur limit of 150 parts per million (ppm) and premium unleaded petrol is legislated to have a limit of 50ppm sulfur by 2008. We understand that most of the bittering agents currently being trialled are mercaptan based, and as such will have the effect of raising the sulfur levels in fuels to which they are added. While older cars may not be affected by fuels with higher sulfur levels, the newer cars utilise emissions control technology that is highly sensitive to sulfur

contamination, and are likely to be affected if the sulfur levels in the fuels exceed the allowable limits.

Mrcaptans have also been identified as a key player in a recent incident in USA where the fuel was causing corrosion of silver components used in the petrol tank fuel level units. These units are embedded in the fuel tank and are immersed in the petrol. This had the effect of fuel gauge giving false readings leading motorists stranded with empty fuel tanks whilst their fuel gauges still registered the presence of petrol. These same units are found amongst many vehicles in the Australian car parc.

We therefore suggest that the researchers on the bittering study be encouraged to look into this aspect of their work as it relates to transport fuels. We would be happy to facilitate links to the appropriate experts within the petroleum industry to assist in providing a more detailed understanding of this issue.

Comgas Scheme – Opal Fuel

We welcome your positive support for recent industry initiatives to develop a lead free motor spirit that is unattractive to petrol sniffers. We are seeing strong levels of interest from many of the remote communities around Australia in having access to this new fuel and we would encourage NIAT to follow up this matter with all State and Territory governments to ensure that there are no barriers to the use of the new fuel in these communities. In particular, we note your support in encouraging State and Territory governments to remove any price disparity between regular petrol and the new fuel, by ensuring that the new fuel is eligible for any State/Territory fuel subsidy applying to regular petrol.

AIP member companies are closely monitoring the uptake of the new fuel and how communities view the fuel as means of removing incentives for petrol sniffing. We would be happy to participate in a review of the impact of the supply of the new fuel to communities under the Comgas Scheme, at an appropriate time.

Need to watch for and respond to new ‘displacement’ trends

The industry has learnt through the experience of Comgas that the strength of the scheme is limited by the extent to which the scheme simply displaces people from one form of inhalant to another. We are encouraged by the focus of the Taskforce on the full range of potential inhalants.