



EDITORIAL

Toluene – Uses and Risks

Toluene is a clear, colourless liquid with a sweet and sharp smell. It occurs naturally in crude oil and coal. It is produced in the process of making gasoline and other fuels from crude oil and making coal from mined coal.

Its largest use is in the manufacture of Benzene – a chemical used for the manufacturing of paints, adhesives, rubber, paint, thinners, nail polish, nail polish removers, antifreeze printing and leather tanning products. It is also used to boost octane in gasoline and kerosene. Exposure to Toluene, both acute and chronic can occur through contamination of consumed water and food, inhalation of contaminated air by gasoline, paints, paint thinners and adhesives.

Toluene consumption primarily targets the central nervous system. Mild to moderate exposure can lead to tiredness, nausea, memory loss, confusion, weakness and loss of appetite. It can also lead to tremor, impaired concentration, drunkenness and euphoria. High blood level exposure can lead to unconsciousness, respiratory depression and even death. High-level exposure can also lead to liver and kidney damage. Surface contact can lead to skin irritation, dermatitis.

Some of the effects of Toluene inhalation, are namely: euphoria, intoxication, and impaired concentration have played into the hands of street children all over the world.

The inhalation of Toluene in adhesive glue, commonly known as glue-sniffing, is widespread in street children in African, Asia, South and Central America. Exposure to Toluene by these children leads to brain damage that manifests as drunkenness memory loss, confusion, hearing impairment, coma and even death.



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