



## Open Source Brief 17 July 2013

**\*\*Special Attention Central Florida Health Care Providers\*\***

### Smoking Alcohol - A Dangerous Re-Immerging Trend

#### (U) BACKGROUND

This Brief was produced to alert emergency medical responders and healthcare providers to the dangerous levels of toxicity that can be presented by patients who have smoked alcohol. Although this practice is dangerous, it is not illegal. It is being practiced by young adults all over the country and causing serious medical emergencies and deaths as a result. Because this is a returning trend, unfamiliar to health care providers, there is no statistical data available concerning hospitalizations and deaths. The below information was assembled from open source research and can be duplicated and shared for the purposes of awareness and education.

*Analyst Comment: The Florida Poison Control Centers are familiar with this practice although they were unable to provide any specific statistics. A Certified Specialist in Poisonings at the Miami Poison Control Center stated that this is a subject that needs to be presented so emergency health care providers are aware of the potential dangers.<sup>1</sup>*



<sup>1</sup> Phone Interview: Robert Delvalle, Certified Specialist in Poisonings, Miami Poison Control Center

**(U) TRENDS**

Smoking alcohol first occurred in the U.S. in 2004 with the marketing of an alcohol nebulizer called *Alcohol With-Out Liquid* or AWOL. When this product was outlawed in the U.S. the fad seemed to disappear. Based on numerous news reports and internet propaganda, in the last two years smoking alcohol has increased dramatically in both the high school and college student population<sup>2</sup>. Unlike drinking alcohol, where both vomiting and liver action plays a role in detoxification, this form of alcohol intake is dangerous, can trigger a medical emergency and lead to death.

*Analyst Comment: Emergency medical personnel need to be aware of this practice, be ready to treat patients who overdose on alcohol and report incidents to Poison Control.*

Several different processes are used to release the alcohol from any over the counter alcoholic beverage. Detailed instructions on the internet teach a viewer how to add dry ice to an alcoholic beverage and breathe in the vapors as they are released out of the bottle. Another method is to heat the glass containing the alcohol beverage. This releases the alcohol vapors into the bottle and it is subsequently inhaled using a straw. The third method is to pressurize the bottle using a cork and a bicycle pump. Once pressurized, the cork is rapidly removed. The sudden change in pressure vaporizes the alcohol in the air space of the bottle and the user then inhales the vapors. All methods are efficient and cause almost instantaneous effects. Instead of waiting 20 minutes for a buzz from ingesting alcohol, there is a large degree of intoxication and impairment very quickly after it is inhaled.<sup>3</sup>



*Photo source: Internet*

The danger of smoking alcohol is related to the rapid absorption of alcohol into the blood stream and its effects on the brain. When a person binge drinks too quickly the result is nausea and vomiting. In addition, when alcohol is absorbed from the intestines it makes a direct route through the liver assisting in the detoxification. This often prevents alcohol poisoning. But, when alcohol vapors are inhaled these protective processes do not occur. Instead, large amounts of alcohol can enter the blood stream move directly to the brain and cause alcohol poisoning (toxicity).

<sup>2</sup> The Dangers of Smoking Alcohol, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglatter/2013/06/21/the-dangers-of-smoking-alcohol/>, Pharma and Healthcare, June 21, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Hohn D. Roache, professor of Psychiatry and Pharmacology at UT Health Science Center San Antonio, <http://www.kens5.com/news/Its-a-poison-New-trend-of-Inhaling-alcohol-vapors-alarming-doctors-193134051.html>

Because alcohol depresses normal body functions the symptoms can include:

- ✓ Confusion, stupor
- ✓ Seizures
- ✓ Slow breathing (less than eight breaths a minute)
- ✓ Irregular breathing (a gap of more than 10 seconds between breaths)
- ✓ Blue tinged or pale skin
- ✓ Low body temperature
- ✓ Unconsciousness (can't be awakened)
- ✓ Vomiting and inhaling the vomit because of a lack of gag reflex

These people are at risk of dying.<sup>4</sup>

### (U) RESPONSE

Alcohol poisoning is NOT the same as being drunk. Here are some important guidelines and identifiers for emergency services and law enforcement:

#### Guidelines:

- If you have a question about if a person has alcohol poisoning or is just intoxicated call the poison control center. By calling 800 222-1222 you will be routed to your local poison control center. They will advise if a person needs to go to the hospital for treatment.
- Don't leave an unconscious person alone. Alcohol poisoning affects the way your gag reflex works. An unconscious person may choke on his or her own vomit and accidentally inhale (aspirate) vomit into the lungs, which could cause death.<sup>3</sup>

**POISON**  
**Help**  
**1-800-222-1222**



<sup>4</sup> Alcohol Poisoning, Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/alcohol-poisoning/DS00861>

**Identifiers:**

- ✓ May find glassware with a match or candle burning under it and alcohol products in the vicinity with a distinct smell of alcohol in the air or in the bottle.<sup>5</sup>

*Analyst Comment: One commercial product currently being sold in the U.S. is the Vaporini. The Vaporini is a glass globe with a metal ring (pictured right). The globe is positioned on an elevated metal stand with a candle burning below it. The metal ring around the globe clearly spells out "Vaporini".*



- ✓ Dry Ice with alcohol products in the same area may also be found.
- ✓ A bicycle pump hooked to a cork that fits inside of a plastic two liter bottle.



*Analyst Comment: Smoking alcohol is not illegal. This bulletin is developed to alert medical responders to the possibility of acute alcohol poisoning (toxicity) that can occur while smoking alcohol. It is important to understand that unconscious persons who have been smoking alcohol can present a serious medical emergency and should not be considered or classified just as a "simple intoxication".*

<sup>5</sup> Polk County Sheriff's Office Information Bulletin

YouTube Videos on Smoking Alcohol:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOa\\_GXNpuJk&NR=1&feature=fvwp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOa_GXNpuJk&NR=1&feature=fvwp)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KscCY7gJaQI>

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