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Parents, teachers urged to watch for inhalant abuse

AUSTIN (AP) — The state's anti-drug agency is urging parents and teachers to watch for signs of inhalant abuse among Texas children.

A recent survey of Texas public school students found that 20 percent in grades seven through 12 admitted using inhalants at least once; 8.1 percent of seventh-graders said they'd tried inhalants at least once in the past month.

"Students in elementary and middle school say they are attracted to inhalants because they are cheap, legal, easy to obtain, conveniently packaged and easy to hide from parents," the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse said Wednesday.

The agency released a report on inhalant abuse that said inhaling correction fluid, solvents, paint, glue and other products often leads children, many not yet in their teens on "a destructive journey to addiction."

"Early inhalant abuse is clearly an indicator of high risk for multiple problems with school and other drugs," the report said.

TCADA said that inhalants, which depress the central nervous system, can cause brain damage, visual and hearing impairment, and even death, even for first-time users.

Inhalants also can cause emotional instability, bizarre behavior, intense fear and anxiety, withdrawal, depression and suicidal thoughts.

According to TCADA officials, inhalant use appears to peak among students aged 13 and 14, then declines as chronic users drop out of school and older students move on to marijuana and alcohol.

"The good news is that children can be taught to resist social pressures to try drugs, like inhalants," the agency says in an informational brochure designed to help parents and teachers learn more about the problem.

"Parents can help by being informed about inhalants, talking to their children about the dangers of inhalant use, and by keeping household chemicals out of the reach of young children."

Helicopter crash kills two

FORT WORTH (AP) — A Tarrant County Sheriff's Department helicopter on a training mission crashed Wednesday in the northwest part of the county, killing two employees.

The chopper crashed about 10 a.m. in clear weather on property owned by Kenneth Copeland Ministries, which is across the street from an abandoned National Guard base, said sheriff's department Sgt. M. Massey.

A ministry security worker called 911 to report the accident, she said.

The victims were identified as pilot George Maurice Hendrix, 51, and Thomas Jay Smith, 45, of Fort Worth.

The Bell OH-58 was one of the helicopters the department acquired and adapted for police use in anti-drug efforts. It was used in a training mission when the crash occurred, a department official said.

Representatives from the department, Federal Aviation Administration, National Transportation Safety Board and Texas Department of Public Safety were called to help investigate, Massey said.

The cause of the accident was unknown.

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