



Department
of Health

From Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Minister of State for Care and Support

Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1A 2NS

Mrs L Hashmi
Assistant Coroner
HM Coroner's Court
The Phoenix Centre
Church Street
Heywood
OL10 1LR

10 SEP 2014

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Dear Mrs Hashmi,

Thank you for your letter following the inquest into the death of Sindy Woodhall. In your report you state that the medical cause of death was from Butane and Propane inhalation toxicity.

The deceased had long standing addictions to alcohol, Butane and Propane and was known to misuse these gases on a regular basis. On the 24 October 2013, the deceased was found in a collapsed state on the street near her home, by a passer-by. She was taken to hospital but subsequently died.

I was sorry to read of Ms Woodhall's death and wish to extend my sincere sympathies to her family.

You raise the following matters of concern:

- During the course of the inquest, it transpired that cans of the aforementioned gases were being sold to the deceased by local retailers who were fully aware of her addition/problems. Whilst morally reprehensible, there was no law to prevent them from selling large amounts of the toxic/potentially fatal gases to the deceased.
- Lack of regulation.
- No powers afforded to Trading Standards to take action/prosecute.
- Risk to public health.

I note that you sent your report to the Chief Executive of Public Health England (PHE). Please be advised that PHE is an executive agency of the Department of Health.

I am aware that the Chief Executive of PHE, Duncan Selbie, has already responded to you directly about the concerns you raise in this Regulation 28 report.



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I have attached the PHE response for completeness. I fully support the views and advice given in this response and have nothing further to add.

I hope that this response is helpful and I am grateful to you for bringing the circumstances of Ms Woodhall's death to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



NORMAN LAMB



Public Health
England

*Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London SE1 8UG
Tel: 020 7654 8090
www.gov.uk/phe*

5 August 2014

**Mrs LJ Hashmi
Assistant Coroner
Greater Manchester North
HM Coroner's Court
The Phoenix Centre
L/Cpl Stephen Shaw
MC Way
Heywood OL10 1LR**

Dear Mrs Hashmi

Sindy Louise Woodhall Deceased – Date of Birth 13.08.1969 – Date of Death 23.10.2013

Thank you for sending your regulation 28 notice following the inquest into the sad death of Ms Woodhall.

We share your concern about abuse of volatile substances (VSA) such as butane and propane and have been working with the Department of Health to support their efforts to restrict inappropriate access to these products. A large number of retailers already restrict access to butane lighter refills and some have committed to restricting the sale of multiple canisters in one transaction. The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) was asked by the public health minister last year to urge its members to remove accessible displays and restrict sales to one can per customer. ACS reassured the minister that its members already had policies in place to restrict access to butane.

We understand that Oldham's new service specification for provision of specialist treatment of substance misuse makes clear that the new service should cover all substances, including volatile ones. The local Alcohol and Drugs Strategic Forum, chaired by the local authority's Director of Public Health and attended by the Head of Trading Standards/Licensing, is looking at closer working with retailers on this matter and will consider the issue at its next meeting.

We have recently refined the information we collect on VSA as part of the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System in line with recommendations from Re-Solv, the national charity dedicated to the prevention of VSA, in part to add propane to the data collected routinely on people presenting with butane abuse.