

Please be advised that in an effort to maintain our non-toxic environment, the Woodstock School of Art does not permit the use of turpentine or mineral spirits. Additionally, please refrain from wearing perfume, cologne or scents of any kind.

In general, solvents are one of the most underrated hazards in art. They are used for a million purposes: to dissolve and mix with oils, resins, varnishes, inks; to remove paint, varnish, lacquers; to clean brushes, tools, silk screens and even hands. As a result, artists are continually being exposed to solvents.

Almost all organic solvents are poisonous if swallowed or inhaled in sufficient quantity, and most cause dermatitis after sufficient skin contact. High concentrations of most solvents can cause narcosis (dizziness, nausea, fatigue, loss of coordination, coma, and the like). This can increase the chances for mistakes and accidents. As mentioned earlier, long-term exposure to high concentrations of many solvents can cause brain damage.

by Michael McCann, PhD, CIH

Danger! Aspiration hazard. Combustible. Harmful or fatal if swallowed. Harmful by breathing vapors. Exposure may result in naseau, headache, confusion, instability or in irritation of the eyes or chest.

from the text on a container of Weber Odorless Turpenoid

High concentrations of vapor or mist may cause nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, loss of coordination, numbness, and other central nervous system effects. Massive acute overexposure may cause rapid central nervous system depression, sudden collapse, coma, and/or death.

from ODORLESS MINERAL SPIRITS MATERIAL SAFETY DATA SHEET, MSDS Form No. 82739

Mineral spirits definition-a petroleum distillate that is used especially as a paint or varnish thinner.

from Merriam-Webster

Most oil painters are familiar with turpentine. We know the "piney" odor. It is a smell I closely associate with my time in art school. Many painters became aware of the toxicity of turpentine and switched to mineral spirits which frequently are odorless. There is a common misconception that if you can't detect an odor then it can't hurt you. This is patently false. Read the label. If you see the words "contains petroleum distillates" (or any variation thereof) stay away.

Mineral spirits, also known as white spirit, mineral turpentine, turpentine substitute, petroleum spirits, solvent naphtha (petroleum), varsol, Stoddard solvent, or, generically, "paint thinner", are clearly highly toxic. Commercial names used in the fine art material industry are Weber Odorless Turpenoid, Gamblin Gamsol Odorless Mineral Spirits, Sunnyside Odorless Paint Thinner, not to mention that virtually every manufacturer of oil paint offers their own version, i.e.-Winsor & Newton Artists' White Spirit. Additionally, most manufacturers of oil paint offer prepared painting mediums containing mineral spirits, i.e.-Old Holland Oil Painting Medium as well as the very popular Winsor & Newton Liquin Mediums. Interestingly, the MSDS on Liquin states "Suspected of causing cancer."

While there are many alternatives to traditional oil painting which don't utilize solvents it may be difficult for many to make such a change overnight. All solvents are toxic. However, the degree of toxicity varies. It has been established that the worst offenders are turpentine and mineral spirits, both of which are not permitted at the Woodstock School of Art.

LOW TOXICITY SOLVENTS

There are several solvents which are considerably less toxic than the school does allow. These include the following:

- **Weber Turpenoid Natural (green can)**
- **Grumbacher Grumtine**
- **Eco-House Xtra Mild Citrus Thinner #115**

These solvents contain d-limonene which acts as the solvent. Limonene takes its name from the lemon, as the rind of the lemon, like other citrus fruits, contains considerable amounts of this compound, which contributes to their odor.

- It is important to note that **Weber Turpenoid Natural** is to be used **ONLY** as a solvent.
- According to the manufacturer, original formula **Grumtine** is a strong, effective, finest quality oil painting medium and solvent for cleaning brushes.
- **Eco-House Xtra Mild Citrus Thinner #115** may be used both as a thinner and a solvent. Additionally, Eco-House offers several other similar products in different strengths.

The School also allows the use of **Oil of Spike Lavender** which is offered by several different manufacturers. While more expensive than the above solvents it has been in use for centuries (Leonardo is thought to have used it) and minimal quantities are required for its usage. It may be used both as a solvent and as a medium. Some research into this product is recommended for those considering its usage.

Lastly, many popular fragrances contain, among many things, petroleum distillate and should be avoided.