

**Safety Tip of the Month – September 2007**  
**VSI Safety Committee**  
**“Take Caution with Muscle Creams”**

With the beginning of another swimming season; sore, tired muscles are to be expected. However, caution should be used in how we treat these sore muscles. Excessive use of muscle creams containing methyl salicylate, the wintergreen-scented ingredient found in anti-inflammatory liniments such as; *Ben Gay*, *Icy Hot* and *Tiger Balm* should be avoided. It was reported a couple of months ago that a 17 year old track star died from an accidental overdose of this muscle cream ingredient. If the tired sore muscles persist, it would be best to seek treatment from a doctor rather than use these types of creams. There has to be a heightened awareness and agreement within the sports community that these products are something that needs to be used under medical supervision.

Several reasons for medical supervision of muscle analgesic creams are:

- If it is smeared over too large an area of the body it can be hazardous, due to the increased load of salicylate absorption.
- Certain skin conditions may be made worse by application of muscle creams.
- Other medications may interact negatively with these products that contain methyl salicylate.
- Individuals with asthma, rhinitis and allergies to aspirin products may manifest a severe reaction to methyl salicylate creams.

Signs and symptoms of methyl salicylate overdose include abdominal discomfort, hepatitis (liver failure), kidney failure, fever, fast breathing rate, bruising and restlessness. This tragic incident with the 17 year old athlete may have been a rare incident, but it is a reminder to us all about the importance of knowing your ingredients and not using any product to excess. Let's all be safe with these type products rather than have another tragic incident happen.