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In Japan, the Web prompts suicides by hydrogen sulfide gas

Online forums are advocating an "easier" suicide method.

Farhad Manjoo

Apr. 24, 2008 | A 14-year-old girl in Konan, in southern Japan, [killed herself](#) on Wednesday night by mixing bathroom cleaner and bath salts to create poisonous hydrogen sulfide gas, a method that has been popularized by online "suicide forums."

During the past several weeks [at least 10 people have died](#) in such incidents (and some reports put the number [above 40](#)).

On Thursday in Shinoyama, [AFP reports](#), a man was found dead in his car parked in a forest. Police found a box of detergent nearby, and a sign attached to the windshield that read, "The car is filled with highly dense hydrogen sulfide." Another man was found dead in a car in Kyoto; a note on his car read, "Don't open. Dangerous hydrogen sulfide being generated."

Police are particularly concerned because the gas can harm not only those who are trying to kill themselves but also people nearby who happen to inhale it.

In Wednesday's incident, 90 people in the girl's apartment building were sickened by the hydrogen sulfide gas that poured out of her bathroom window; 10 were hospitalized.

In [another incident](#) in Kobe late in March, an elderly couple was awakened by a strange smell.

The man ran to the bathroom door, where he saw a sign posted by his 27-year-old son: "Generating poison gas, don't open." The man pushed open the door and was killed instantly by the gas. The son was dead as well.

Japan has one of the [highest suicide rates in the world](#), and studies suggest that the Web has led to an increase in deaths, especially among young people. Japan has lately seen a rise in "[suicide pacts](#)," in which people who meet online agree to kill themselves at a set time and place.

The latest trend is most chilling for its pursuit of operational efficiency -- sites advocating the hydrogen sulfide method push its ease of use, its low cost, and its difficulty of detection, especially when compared to a previous suicide trend, creating carbon monoxide gas using small charcoal burners.

As The Australian [reports](#), on one suicide site, a "Mr. Nameless" advertises,

A new suicide method has been developed as an alternative to charcoal suicide.

You don't have to light a fire and it's easier than charcoal. All you have to do is buy two different brands of liquid [which he names] that are easily available from the drug store.

The posted signs are a hallmark of the lethal meme; the suicide forums warn people to keep others away from the area during a suicide attempt.

As part of a wide-ranging suicide reduction program, the Japanese government has tried to filter and censor sites that advocate suicide or promote specific methods -- so far to no avail.

-- Farhad Manjoo

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