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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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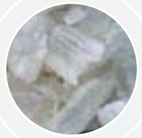
GLOBAL SMART UPDATE 2012

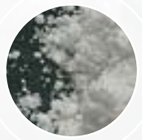
About the SMART Update

The threat of synthetic drugs is one of the most significant drug problems worldwide. After cannabis, amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are the second most widely used drugs across the globe, outstripping the use of cocaine and heroin. Since 1990 the illicit manufacture of ATS has been reported from more than 65 countries and the figure keeps rising. Trends on the synthetic drug market evolve quickly each year.



The UNODC Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme enhances the capacity of Member States in priority regions to generate, manage, analyse, report and use synthetic drug information to design effective policy and programme interventions. Global SMART was launched in September 2008 and provides capacity-building in East and South-East Asia and, since 2011, in Latin America. Global SMART also regularly reviews the ATS situation in the Pacific region. Features of UNODC Global SMART are online data collection, situation reports and regional assessments. A review of the global ATS situation was issued in September 2011. The third annual review of patterns and trends of ATS and Other Drugs in Asia and the Pacific 2011 was issued in November 2011, providing detailed data and information on 15 countries in East and South-East Asia, with regional coverage of South Asia and Oceania.

The Global SMART Update is designed to provide regular brief reporting on emerging patterns and trends of the fast changing global synthetic drug situation. Given the speed at which changes in the ATS markets occur, it is especially important to have a simple sustainable mechanism for frequent information sharing from different parts of the world. The Global SMART Update is published twice a year and is available in English and Spanish.



The Update reports synthetic drug information in several categories, such as significant or unusual drug or precursor chemical seizures, new locations, methods and chemicals used for clandestine manufacture, new trafficking groups or routes, changes in legislation to address the problem of synthetic drugs, environmental impact from their illicit manufacture and destruction, emerging drugs or user groups, and health implications related to their use.*

In this issue

Each issue of the Update contains special coverage and thematic segments. Since October 2010, the special segment of the Update has been expanded to provide a more in-depth review of an issue of current interest. In addition, short regional overviews have been added to provide snapshots of the situation in the regions of the world. In previous issues, the Update highlighted the increasing dimension of ATS trafficking from Africa; the situation on ATS in South Asia; the latest developments on synthetic substances which are sold in ATS markets as 'bath salts' and 'plant food'; and the recent changes in illicit ATS manufacture, particularly the replacement of traditional precursors with alternate chemicals or chemically-modified forms not under international control.

The special segment of the current issue takes a closer look at new psychoactive substances (NPS) - substances which are not controlled under the international drug conventions but which have emerged in all regions of the world and may pose a risk to public health. Broad global concern over NPS led to the adoption of resolution 55/1 entitled "Promoting international cooperation in responding to the challenges posed by new psychoactive substances", at the 55th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the main United Nations drug policy-making body. The segment provides an overview on the various NPS available on illicit ATS markets and a critical assessment of some of the challenges posed by NPS to the international community.

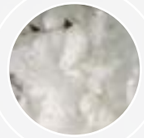
While data on ATS seizures is often easy to obtain, information about the demand for ATS remains scarce and anecdotal in nature. Nevertheless, the Update continues to make a determined effort to highlight the human toll of ATS use. Various demand-related subjects are covered in this issue, including facts that have come to light about the use of synthetic drugs and their impact in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Hungary, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Uruguay, and Viet Nam. The Update also covers the results of the latest ESPAD/EMCDDA study on substance use among students in various European countries.

*The information and data contained within this report are from official Government reports, press releases, scientific journals or incidents confirmed by UNODC Field Offices. Additional or updated information from previously reported incidents may also be included where appropriate. Information denoted with an asterisk (*) are from 'open sources' where UNODC is waiting for official confirmation and therefore should be considered only preliminary. This report has not been formally edited. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of UNODC or contributory organizations and neither do they imply any endorsement. Suggested citation: Global SMART Update Volume 8, September 2012.

Regional overviews

Oceania. Australia and New Zealand continue to be significant markets for ATS, with the highest number of ATS seizures in a decade made at the Australian border. Data on the ATS situation in the Pacific remains sparse but lifetime prevalence of the use of methamphetamine is reported to be high among the young generation. There is also evidence of injecting methamphetamine use in many Pacific Island States and territories, for example, in Vanuatu. Ecstasy use is on the decline in Australia and New Zealand, but annual prevalence remains high at 2.9 per cent.

East and South-East Asia. East and South-East Asia has the second biggest ATS market with methamphetamine seizures steadily increasing accounting for almost half of the global total. Illicit manufacture is reported from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea and Thailand. Drug trafficking organizations from West Africa continue to target the region for methamphetamine smuggling activities. Diversion of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine are commonly observed. New psychoactive substances have also been reported in several countries in the region and Japan has introduced measures against their sale and distribution.



South Asia. In South Asia, there has reportedly been an increase in the use of ATS in Bhutan, Sri Lanka and in Bangladesh, where methamphetamine pills are widely available, especially in urban areas. South Asia continues to be targeted by organized crime groups as a source of ATS precursors, particularly ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Data on ATS use and manufacture in the region is very sparse as no comprehensive assessment on the ATS situation has ever been undertaken.

West Asia and the Middle East. Amphetamine, commonly sold as Captagon, continues to be the most frequently seized substance in this region. The region experienced a large decrease in amphetamine seizures from 23.8 mt in 2009 to 13.5 mt in 2010. However, methamphetamine seizures have increased in some countries in West Asia, including Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some countries have high requirements of ATS precursors which makes them vulnerable to possible diversion of the chemicals to illicit channels. In Pakistan, the disappearance of almost 9 mt of ephedrine is being investigated by authorities. There is an information gap on the use of ATS in the region.

Europe. Amphetamine seizures in Europe continued their downward trend. A significant rise in seized clandestine amphetamine laboratories was observed. Methamphetamine use in Europe continues to expand. The European "ecstasy" market is on the rise as seizures more than doubled from 595 kg in 2009 to 1.3 mt in 2010 and the MDMA content of ecstasy pills seems to increase. New psychoactive substances continue to emerge in the region and data on their use was reported from the UK and Spain. In April 2012, Hungary adopted generic controls over new psychoactive substances and their manufacture, distribution, importation and exportation.

Africa. Methamphetamine continues to be trafficked from African countries, particularly from West Africa to East and South-East Asia. Seizures started to increase in West Africa in 2008, with methamphetamine being smuggled into countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea. Most illicit ATS laboratories are reported from South Africa, but two methamphetamine laboratories have been dismantled in Nigeria. The lack of adequate law enforcement capacity, infrastructure and appropriate legislation hampers the efforts of governments in the region to properly address the activities of drug trafficking organizations.

North America. North America accounted for approximately half of global methamphetamine seizures in 2010 with 22 mt compared to 13.7 mt in 2009. The largest increase of seizures was reported by Mexico where seizures doubled to almost 13 mt. The United States reported a 1 mt increase in methamphetamine seizures as well as higher average purity levels of methamphetamine and declining prices. Furthermore, seizures of unscheduled chemicals frequently used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine are rising. With regard to new psychoactive substances, legislation adding numerous substances to Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act was enacted in July 2012.

Central and South America. Increased seizures of ATS precursors have been reported from countries such as Argentina, Belize and Guatemala. Illicit manufacture of methamphetamine has been reported, mainly from Guatemala, where two laboratories were dismantled. To counteract precursor diversions, Uruguay enacted legislation controlling pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine and ephedrine. The use of ATS has been reported from many countries in the region, most recently from Argentina, due to the focus on traditional plant based drugs such as cocaine, the true ATS situation may be underreported.

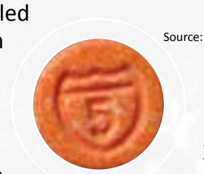
The world's new challenge: New Psychoactive Substances

New psychoactive substances (NPS) were one of the key issues deliberated in March 2012, at the 55th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Broad global consensus on this topic led to the adoption of resolution 55/1 entitled "Promoting international cooperation in responding to the challenges posed by new psychoactive substances". The resolution calls on Member States to monitor emerging trends in the composition, production and distribution of new psychoactive substances, patterns of use and share that information and adopt appropriate measures aimed at reducing supply and demand.

What are NPS?

A NPS is a new narcotic or psychotropic drug, in pure form or in preparation, that is not controlled by the 1961 United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions (European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)). The substances include synthetic compounds such as synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones, piperazines, and the traditional plant-based psychoactive substances such as khat *(Catha edulis)*, kratom *(Mitragyna speciosa)* and *Salvia divinorum*.

Some NPS have pharmacological properties and effects similar to controlled drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines and are therefore frequently marketed as "legal alternatives" to scheduled drugs. NPS are sold as "plant food", "bath salts" or as "research chemicals", in powder, tablet, capsule form or as smoking blends. Seizures of NPS have been made in all regions of the world, including Australia and New Zealand, East and South-East Asia, Near and Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America and South America.



History

New drugs have always appeared on illicit drug markets (see Table 1). However, the pace at which such substances emerge has accelerated considerably. The significant increase of NPS in Europe can be seen from reports of the EMCDDA. Whereas, between 2000 and 2005, on average five substances per year were reported, from 2007 to 2010 about 150 NPS were identified through the EMCDDA Early Warning System. The highest number reported so far were 49 substances in 2011, up from 41 substances in 2010 and just 24 substances in 2009.

Table 1: New psychoactive substances through the years

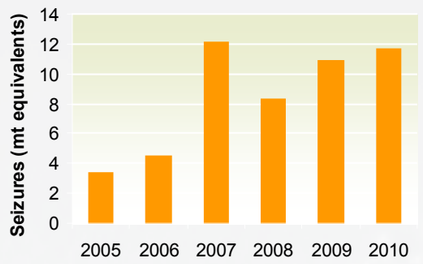
Year	Chemical group	Examples
1960	fentanyl	α-methylfentanyl
	phenethylamines	DOM, MDMA
1980	tryptamines	DiPT, Foxy
2000	piperazines	BZP, mCPP, TFMPP, 2C-B
	synth. cannabinoids	JWH-018,-073,-200
	synth. cathinones	mephedrone, MDPV

An overview of NPS

1. Ketamine

Ketamine is used as an anaesthetic in human and veterinary medicine and has been misused as a hallucinogen for almost 30 years. It is often sold as a liquid or whitish powder and as 'ecstasy' or 'amphetamine'. Use has been reported from Asia, Americas, Europe and Oceania. The substance is controlled in many countries such as China, India and the United States. Overall seizures increased from 3.4 mt in 2005 up to 11.7 mt in 2010 (see Figure 1), with several multi-ton seizures made in China, Canada and India.

Figure 1: Ketamine seizures, 2005-2010



Source: UNODC Delta

2. Piperazines

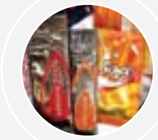
Piperazines emerged first in Europe, New Zealand, Australia and spread slowly to countries in Asia and Latin America. The most commonly reported piperazine is benzylpiperazine (BZP), others include meta-Chlorophenylpiperazine (mCPP) and 3-Trifluoromethylphenylpiperazine (TFMPP). As central nervous stimulants piperazines have been sold as 'ecstasy' to meet demand from the illicit drug market. Many countries including Australia, Japan, New Zealand and all countries of the European Union have introduced national controls over BZP to prevent sale and distribution.

3. Synthetic cathinones

Synthetic cathinones are analogues of the internationally controlled stimulant cathinone (one of the psychoactive substances in the khat plant), which are structurally related to amphetamine. 4-methylmethcathinone (mephedrone) and methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV) are the most commonly abused substances. Their use has been linked to fatalities in the European Union and also led to many emergency cases in the United States. Since December 2010, manufacture and marketing of mephedrone is controlled in the European Union and in Switzerland. Some other countries have also taken action to prevent the distribution of mephedrone.

4. Synthetic cannabinoids

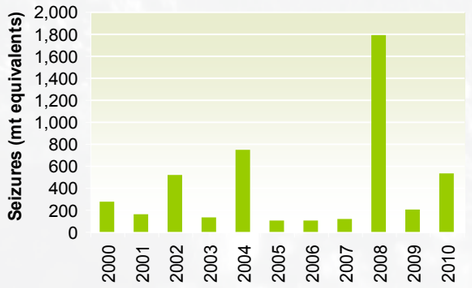
Synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists, e.g. JWH-018 and JWH-122 mimic the effects of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) found in cannabis and are frequently sold on the internet and in specialized shops as a smoking mixture. They first appeared on the drug market in 2007 and became very popular among young adults and teenagers in Europe and the United States in a very short time.



5. Plant-based substances: Khat, Kratom and *Salvia divinorum*

Khat *(Catha edulis)* is the most widespread plant-based NPS and mainly grows in Eastern Africa. The main psychoactive ingredients in khat are stimulants cathine and cathinone, which are structurally similar to amphetamine and controlled by the 1971 Convention. The khat plant itself is not controlled. In 2010, 533 mt were seized (see Figure 2). Kratom *(Mitragyna speciosa)* is a plant indigenous to South-East Asia, containing the alkaloid mitragynine. It is controlled in a number of countries, including Australia, Bhutan, Denmark, Malaysia, Myanmar, Lithuania and Thailand. In 2010, 24 mt were seized. *Salvia divinorum* is found in Latin America and is said to be the most potent naturally-occurring psychedelic ever discovered, containing the Terpenoid Salvinorin A.

Figure 2: Khat seizures, 2000-2010



Source: UNODC Delta

Challenges of NPS

Although many of the psychoactive substances have been on the market for a long time the diversity of products has increased considerably, as manufacturers of NPS are very adaptive and flexible. The variety, the changing physical forms and constant modifications in labelling makes it difficult for law enforcement and other authorities to identify NPS. Laboratories often do not have the analytical, forensic and toxicological capabilities. In addition, there are only a small number or no reference standards available which could help in the identification process. Often, the actual composition of NPS are unknown to users as well as to health workers or law enforcement officers. The listed contents on the package do not always match the active ingredients present and generic terms are used.

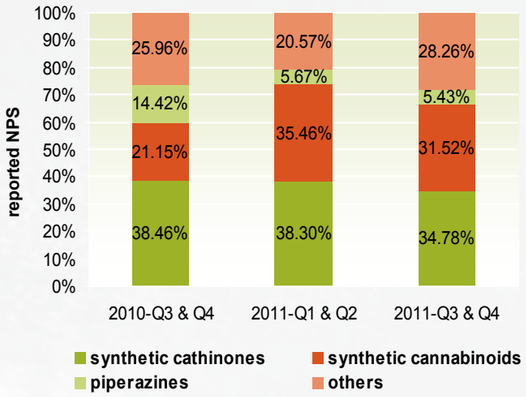
The Internet is being increasingly used to facilitate distribution of these substances to a global audience. The EMCDDA has noted a steady increase in the number of online shops selling NPS: from 170 in 2010, to 314 in 2011 and 690 in 2012.

Global NPS monitoring

While several countries have set up national monitoring systems - e.g. Australia has established the Ecstasy and related Drugs Reporting System, Europe is the only region in the world where a regional Early Warning System has been set up which is managed by the EMCDDA.

Participating drug testing laboratories of the UNODC International Collaborative Exercises (ICE), report regularly on new psychoactive substances. In 2011, 42 per cent of 128 laboratories (48 countries) reported NPS. Synthetic cathinones were mostly found, followed by synthetic cannabinoids (Figure 3). The emergence of piperazines appeared to be declining in 2011.

Figure 3: Summary of NPS reported through the ICE portal 2010-2011



Source: UNODC Delta

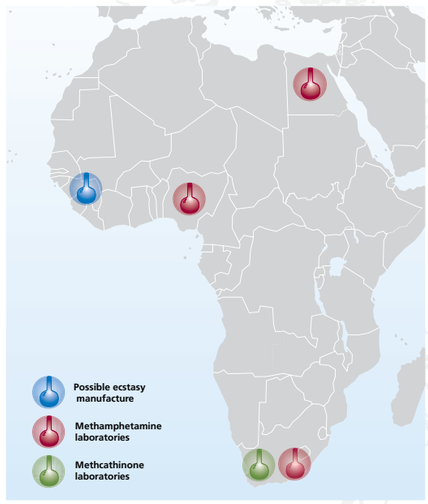
The importance of monitoring, analysing and reporting emerging trends in the composition, manufacture, distribution and patterns of use of NPS is crucial. Collection and subsequent sharing of NPS-related information will substantially improve the capacity to detect and monitor new trends of NPS which in turn can contribute to preventing the rapid expansion of the problem. Further possible health and social implications can be assessed and evidence based treatment can be pursued. In addition, effective policy and programme interventions aimed at reducing both supply and demand can be designed. A global early warning system, with updates and alerts might be one approach to address this issue.

UNODC points to growth of amphetamine-type stimulants in West Africa

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime launched a new report on amphetamine-type stimulants, the West Africa – 2012 ATS Situation Report in June 2012. The report focuses on the growing trend of synthetic drugs in West Africa specifically, and the African continent in general, and warns of an increase in the manufacture, trafficking and use of these illicit substances in recent years. The synthetic drugs available in the region are mostly amphetamine, methamphetamine, methcathinone and ecstasy-group substances.

Historical background. For centuries, Africa has played a role in the global trade in both licit and illicit psychoactive substances, and heroin and cocaine have been trafficked through the region for more than a decade. Since 2006, there are indications that West African countries are being used as trans-shipment points for precursor chemicals such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, the main chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, from Asia. Since 2008, there have been an increasing number of reports of trafficking of methamphetamine from West Africa to Europe.

Indications of ATS manufacture in Africa since 2009



Source: *Amphetamines and Ecstasy: 2011 Global ATS Assessment*, Global SMART Programme, UNODC, September 2011.

Methamphetamine manufacture reported for the first time. Unlike cocaine or heroin, illicit ATS manufacture does not rely on the cultivation of naturally occurring plants such as coca or opium poppy, and as such, is not limited to certain geographic locations. This leaves the possibility that West Africa could be transformed not only into a key transit point in the trafficking of ATS, but has the potential to also become an ATS manufacturing hub. The first evidence of methamphetamine manufacture emerged from Nigeria in 2011 and in 2012, a second methamphetamine laboratory was dismantled by the Nigerian Drug Law Enforcement Agency.

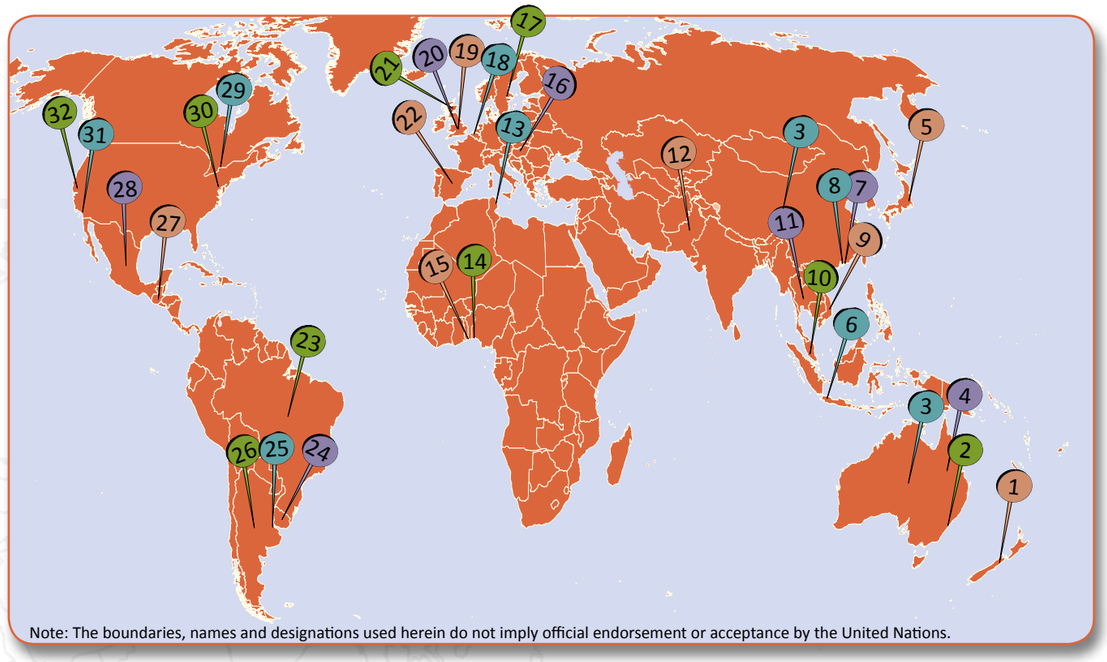
Increased ATS trafficking to East and South-East Asia. Since 2008, cases of methamphetamine trafficking from West African countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria and Senegal to countries in East and South-East Asia have been reported. Common destinations are Japan, Malaysia, Republic of Korea and Thailand. Trafficking organizations target these markets due to the high price of methamphetamine. In Japan, for example, 1 kg of methamphetamine can be sold for at least 212,600 USD. Outside the region, Australia and New Zealand have also reported the increasing role of West African organized crime groups in the trafficking of ATS and their precursors. Drugs are usually trafficked by air, in fairly small quantities (between 1 and 2 kg) but larger shipments have also been reported.

Precursor chemical diversions on the rise. Other parts of the region are also experiencing a rise in ATS-related illicit activity. As governments have been strengthening controls over ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in recent years, there has been a shift in trafficking routes to Africa. In Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, authorities have reported rising thefts of methamphetamine precursors. In Kenya 21 thefts amounting to 2,253 kg were reported to the Pharmacy and Poisons Board between September 2009 and December 2011, which could have been used to manufacture over 1,500 kg methamphetamine. While there have been no reports of illicit ATS manufacture from the country, Kenyan couriers have been arrested with methamphetamine in South-East Asia. Such incidents provide indications on potential methamphetamine manufacture, which could be a future trend.

Lack of awareness. Assessing the true ATS situation in West Africa and Africa as a whole remains difficult due to the persistent lack of data from the region. Less than 20% of African countries and territories submit annual reports to UNODC and reported seizures of both ATS and their precursors are scarce. The present information deficit on ATS in the region is principally due to a general lack of awareness of ATS, as law enforcement authorities tend to focus on the interception of 'traditional' plant-based drugs. The lack of effective law enforcement systems and border and precursor controls make West Africa an attractive location for the diversion and trafficking of ATS and essential ATS precursor chemicals such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Difficult economic and living conditions in many West African countries have led to further expanding the West African involvement in the heroin and cocaine drugs trade, which might also apply to the potential expansion of the illicit ATS trade in the region.

The report is available online at:
http://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/ATS_West_Africa_final_2012.pdf

Regions covered in this issue



Global SMART segments are arranged based on regional threat. Oceania has among the highest prevalence rates for ATS use in the world, while the number of ATS users are greatest in East Asia. Therefore, the map and corresponding index of segments begins with recent events from Oceania and East Asia and then moves geographically westward. The numbered pins on the map above correspond with the index of segments below.

Index of segments

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32 SAN JOSE, United States – 1 March 2012

1

New Zealand: Control strategy targets street level dealing of methamphetamine


Source: New Zealand Police

MANUKAU, New Zealand – 13 June 2012. As a result of *Operation Foiled* of the New Zealand Police, 311 grams of methamphetamine with a street value of over USD 239,000 were seized in June 2012. Operation Foiled is carried out by 50 police officers of Counties Manukau (South Auckland) Police and targets street level drug dealing across Manukau. Since the end of January to June 2012, a total of 412 grams of methamphetamine has been recovered. The Operation was carried out in the context of the Government's Methamphetamine Control Strategy, which was developed in 2009 and is designed to disrupt the supply of methamphetamine and reduce methamphetamine related crime. New Zealand Police work closely with partners like health agencies, and community groups to reduce the impact of drugs and crime.

2

Australia: record methamphetamine seizure (306 kg)

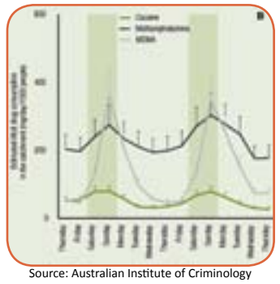
SYDNEY, Australia – 30 July 2012. 306 kg of crystalline methamphetamine and 252 kg of heroin with a market value of almost USD 524 million, were seized in Sydney during a joint operation by the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. This marks the largest seizure of crystalline methamphetamine in AFP history (in 2010/11 404 kg of ATS were seized) and the third largest seizure of heroin. Four nationals from Hong Kong and three Australia-based suspects were arrested. Investigations into the drug syndicate started in August 2011, following information received from the Drug Enforcement Administration of the United States. On 19 July 2012 two suspect cargo consignments with 3,200 terracotta pots were inspected by Customs and Border Protection officers at Port Botany (South-Eastern Sydney) and 100 of them were found to contain the drugs. The suspects have been charged with offences including smuggling and possession of a commercial quantity of methamphetamine which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

3

Joint Australian and Chinese operation dismantles drug syndicate

AUSTRALIA and CHINA – 27 June 2012. The Australian Federal Police and the National Narcotics Control Commission of China have joined forces for the first time to dismantle an alleged transnational drug trafficking organization. Authorities in Australia and China have seized a combined total of 3.35 mt of safrole-rich oil, containing 331 kg of safrole. A total of nine persons were arrested in connection with the seizure, six in China and three in Australia. This joint investigation started in April 2011 in Sydney, when Australian Customs and Border Protection officers detected three consignments of 2, 800 lt safrole oil hidden in a shipment of shampoo bottles (see segment 4 of Global SMART Update Vol.6). In September 2011, three men were charged in relation with this trafficking attempt. Further investigations by the National Control Commission of China resulted in seizures of 500 kg safrole oil in March and April 2012.

4


Source: Australian Institute of Criminology

Wastewater analysis in Queensland shows increased methamphetamine and MDMA abuse on weekends

QUEENSLAND, Australia – June 2012. Results of the first wastewater analysis conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology show increased use of methamphetamine and ecstasy during weekends. Scientists estimate that on average 273 mg (2010) methamphetamine was used per 1000 people a day on weekends and 212 mg/day/1000 during weekdays. Ecstasy use was estimated on average at 244 mg/day/1000 on weekends and 100 mg/day/1000 on weekdays. In this study, wastewater was sampled at the inlet of a sewage treatment plant that receives water from a catchment in Queensland, with a population of over 150,000 people. Samples were collected over a period of 12 days in November 2009 and over a period of 15 days in November 2010, to estimate daily methamphetamine, ecstasy and cocaine use.

5

Japan: increased control of new psychoactive substances

JAPAN – August 2012. The Japanese Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry has announced the designation of four synthetic substances - mephedrone, methylenedioxypyrovalerone (MDPV), JWH-018 and cannabicyclohexanol – as "narcotics" under the Pharmaceutical Affairs Law by August 2012. The new psychoactive substances, which are widely sold across Japan, will be made illegal and subjected to the same legal guidelines as traditional narcotics. The Ministry is also working on a regulation to regularly assess new psychoactive substances and re-designate their status where appropriate. This would help to ensure that new substances with slightly different chemical compositions but similar effects to controlled drugs, could be scheduled under the above regulation as well. Authorities in Japan have also reported a number of cases of people injuring others while driving under the influence of the new synthetic substances.

6

Indonesia: 382,000 ecstasy pills and 30.5 kg crystalline methamphetamine seized

JAKARTA, Indonesia – 3 May 2012. Jakarta Police seized 382,000 ecstasy pills and 30.5 kg of crystalline methamphetamine during drug raids which took place over two weeks in March and April 2012. The ecstasy pills had an estimated market value of USD 11.8 million and the crystalline methamphetamine was estimated at USD 4.7 million. Sixteen suspects were arrested in connection with the seizure. The drugs were trafficked in suitcases to Indonesia by sea using fishing boats. In total, more than 1 million ecstasy pills and 123 kg of crystalline methamphetamine were confiscated by the Jakarta Police between January to April 2012. Indonesia was formerly used as a transit country for ATS, but emerged during the past six years as a manufacturing location for crystalline methamphetamine and ecstasy, with significant seizures each year. In 2010 crystalline methamphetamine was reported to be the primary drug of use in Indonesia.*

7


Source: Hong Kong Customs

Hong Kong Customs seizes 702 kg of pseudoephedrine in first five months of 2012

HONG KONG, China – 30 May 2012. Hong Kong Customs seized 776,000 tablets of pseudoephedrine inside a cargo consignment which was declared as "Pepper Feeds" and imported from Singapore at Hong Kong International Airport. According to Customs, the chemical could have been used to manufacture about 6.6 kg of methamphetamine with a retail value of around USD 5.2 million. The tablets were destined for mainland China and were packed in aluminium foil bags covered by bags of pepper in eight carton boxes. From January to May 2012, customs officers intercepted six shipments of pseudoephedrine at Airport Cargo Terminals and seized a total of about 702kg of pseudoephedrine tablets which could have been used in manufacturing 34 kg of methamphetamine worth over USD 26.5 million.

8

Hong Kong: 412 kg of ketamine seized


Source: Hong Kong Customs

HONG KONG, China – 30 May 2012. More than 412 kg of ketamine with an estimated retail value of about USD 47 million, was seized by Hong Kong Customs from a river trade vessel arriving from Huangpu (Province Guangdong, South China) destined for Malaysia. A container declared to hold 'ABS Resin' contained ketamine in powder form, packed in 23 bags out of a total of 516 bags of goods. The seizure was made during a counter-narcotics operation at the main port facilities which aimed at disrupting transnational drug trafficking activities and strengthening the inspection of suspicious consignments transported by river trade vessels. A total of 70 containers were checked by Customs. Under the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance, drug trafficking carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and a fine of USD 5 million.


Source: UNODC Viet Nam Country Office

ATS second most popular drug class used in Viet Nam

VIET NAM – 24 May 2012. Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) such as methamphetamine and ecstasy are the second most popular class of illicit drugs in Viet Nam after heroin, according to the report Amphetamine-type stimulants in Viet Nam, which was launched by UNODC in May 2012. The report highlights the rapid growth in drug use among young people many of which live in large cities, border areas and industrial zones. While ATS were predominantly sold in pill form prior to 2008, crystalline methamphetamine has now become more widespread. Methamphetamine pills are reportedly trafficked into the north of Viet Nam most commonly through the Laotian-Vietnamese border. Crystalline methamphetamine is reportedly trafficked mainly from Cambodia into southern Viet Nam.

Malaysia: customs seize ketamine in fake cashew nuts


Source: Bernama

SEPANG, Malaysia – 19 April 2012. An attempt to smuggle ketamine inside fake cashew nuts was uncovered by the Kuala Lumpur International Airport's Royal Malaysian Customs Department. Ketamine with a gross weight of 9.3 kg valued at USD 116,000 had been put into fake cashew nuts made from plastic, and packed together with genuine cashew nuts. An Indian national arriving from Chennai was detained after his bags were inspected and six packages of food containing the fake cashew nuts were found. The contents tested positive for ketamine, a substance not controlled by the international drug control treaties, but which is widely used in several countries in Asia and often sold as 'ecstasy' on these markets. Ketamine seizures in Malaysia were reported at 334 kg in 2010 and 1,071 kg in 2009.*

More than one million methamphetamine pills seized in Thailand

THAILAND – 2 May 2012. National police have seized more than one million methamphetamine pills with a street value of over USD 9.5 million and arrested two men with connections to many other drug trafficking organizations. Two suspects were arrested on charges of possessing illicit drugs and money laundering. Police found 100,000 methamphetamine pills inside the suspects' car and a further 920,000 in their house, wrapped in plastic packages. The house was being used as a warehouse and distribution point for drugs smuggled from Myanmar, then transported from Northern Thailand to Central Thailand before being sold nationwide. The trafficking group is believed to have connections to more than 100 drug networks. Twenty bank accounts were registered in their names and money from over 100 accounts had been transferred into their accounts. The suspects had allegedly been trafficking drugs for over a year.

Pakistan: Possible diversion of 9 mt of ephedrine

PAKISTAN – 4 April 2012. The Supreme Court in Pakistan is investigating a case of possible diversion of 9 mt of ephedrine, which was uncovered in October 2011. In 2010, two pharmaceutical companies obtained export quotas for ephedrine that exceeded the limits the government had reported to the International Narcotics Control Board by 9 mt. Allegedly only 150 kg were used in manufacturing medicines while the rest went missing. Ephedrine is among the most frequently used starting materials in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine. The 9 mt could have been used to manufacture around 6 mt of methamphetamine. Pakistan currently reports the fourth highest legitimate requirement for ephedrine in the world; behind China, the United States and the Republic of Korea. Countries with such high legitimate requirements can be attractive targets for precursor diversion.

World Health Organization convenes 35th Expert Committee on Drug Dependence

HAMMAMET, Tunisia – 4 to 8 June 2012. Substances including Gamma-hydroxybutyric acid, ketamine, 1-(3-chlorophenyl)piperazine (mCPP) and N-benzylpiperazine (BZP) were reviewed at the 35th meeting of the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) of the World Health Organization (WHO) which took place from 4 to 8 June 2012 in Hammamet, Tunisia. This was the first meeting of the ECDD since 2006. The Expert Committee carried out a medical and scientific assessment of the dependence and abuse potential of a number of psychoactive substances, to guide WHO in its mandate with regard to changes in the scope of control of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971. The results of the review are expected to be reported to the next session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, to be held in March 2013.


Source: NDLEA

Nigeria: 25.4 kg of ephedrine concealed in sandals

LAGOS, Nigeria – 13 April 2012. Officers of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency have foiled an attempt by a businessman to traffic 25.4 kg ephedrine to Mozambique as unaccompanied cargo through the Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos. The ephedrine, in powder form, was concealed inside the soles of 11 pairs of sandals. Ephedrine is a precursor chemical used in the manufacture of methamphetamine, but is also used for its stimulant effect. The seizure might indicate that the ephedrine was intended to be further smuggled to South Africa, where regionally, most illicit ATS laboratories were dismantled.

Benin: Nigerian businessman imprisoned for smuggling 5.3 kg methamphetamine


Source: UNODC Regional Office West/ Central Africa

COTONOU, Benin – 10 May 2012. A Nigerian businessman was reportedly arrested with 5.3 kg methamphetamine in Benin by the Central Office for Combating Illicit Trafficking in Drugs and Precursors. The country of origin of the methamphetamine was reported to be Nigeria, transiting Benin and were supposed to be further smuggled through Kenya (Nairobi) to its final destination Bangladesh (Dhaka). The suspect claimed having trafficked drugs through Benin several times before. According to the authorities, traffickers are changing their trafficking strategy and attempt to traffic drugs though freight services at the airport. The Government has made efforts to counteract increased drug trafficking by increasing the capacities of police and boarder control and strengthening the inspection of suspicious consignments.

Hungary: generic ban on new psychoactive substances

BUDAPEST, Hungary – 2 April 2012. The Hungarian Government has issued generic controls over new psychoactive substances (NPS), effective from 2 April 2012. The Government decree (No. 66/2012) introduced a new schedule for NPS, the so called List-C. It lists not only specific compounds, but also groups of compounds in order to prevent attempts at chemical modifications to yield new chemicals not covered under the law. The Government has 12 months to make a risk assessment of the substances on List-C and subsequently decide on either a permanent ban or lifting of the temporary ban. Manufacture, distribution, importation and exportation of these chemicals will be penalized by up to three years in prison. Possession and use are not criminalized. The legislation became necessary due to the rapidly growing trade in NPS and the constantly growing number of drug users requiring treatment.

17

Amphetamines and ecstasy second most used drugs by European students

Source: ESPAD

STOCKHOLM, Sweden – May 2012. Three per cent of European students (15- to 16-year-olds) reported lifetime use with amphetamines and ecstasy, second only to cannabis (17 percent), finds the fifth 'Substances use among students' report of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. Ten out of 36 countries reported amphetamine lifetime use rates above the 3 per cent average including Bulgaria with 7 per cent, Hungary with 6 per cent and Belgium and Liechtenstein with 5 per cent. With regards to ecstasy, the highest country specific use rates were at 4 per cent found in eight countries, such as Albania, Bulgaria, Belgium, Latvia and Monaco. More than 100,000 students from 36 different European countries took part in the survey. Data was collected by group-administered anonymous questionnaires.

18

Belgium: warning against 4-methylamphetamine (4-MA)

BELGIUM – 31 May 2012. Experts warn against 4-methylamphetamine also known as 4-MA, which is suspected to have contributed to the deaths of at least five people in Belgium. The chemical was reported to the Belgian Early Warning System on drugs, which was established as a result of the adoption of the Joint Action on New Synthetic Drugs by the European Union in 1997. The onset effect of 4-MA is slower than that of amphetamine and the effects are believed to be similar to ecstasy and amphetamine. The substance was seized for the first time in 2009, and in August 2011 reportedly led to a death in Belgium. According to the Austrian Check-it initiative which provides information and free testing of synthetic substances to users, 4-MA was firstly registered in Austria in April 2012. The drug was found to contain other substances such as amphetamine or ephedrine and was reportedly sold as "speed". The drug has also appeared in Netherlands and the United Kingdom, where it has been associated with several fatalities.

19

UK bans methoxetamine


Source: UK Home Office

UNITED KINGDOM – 5 April 2012. The UK Government has used a temporary ban on methoxetamine, also called 'mexxy' or MXE, following a recommendation from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD). It is illegal to sell or supply methoxetamine, including giving it away to friends. Possession for personal use has not been criminalized, but police and border officials may search or detain anyone suspected of having the drug and seize or destroy the controlled substance . The temporary order can last for up to 12 months to allow the ACMD to make a full assessment and advise the Government on whether the drug should be permanently banned. Those caught manufacturing, supplying or trafficking the substance face up to 14 years in prison and an unlimited fine under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

20

Ecstasy is the most widely used ATS, according to Guardian/Mixmag survey

UNITED KINGDOM – 14 March 2012. Ecstasy (34 per cent) was found to be the fourth most widely used drug after alcohol and tobacco (92 per cent) and cannabis (53 per cent), according to the Guardian/Mixmag drugs survey, one of the largest assessments of current drug use ever conducted. Over 15,500 drug users (mainly from the UK and the US) responded to the drugs survey carried out online in November 2011. Data provided includes use patterns and trends, effects and quality of drugs and their health implications. The survey also provides an insight on new psychoactive substances with 20 per cent indicating to have bought them in 2011. Only 19.5 per cent of UK users reported the use of mephedrone, since it was banned by the British government in 2010, compared to 51 per cent the year before. Synthetic cannabinoids were rated as more harmful than natural cannabis, with a 2.5 per cent of users reporting that they had sought emergency medical help after using the drug.

21

Scotland: life-time prevalence of ATS second only to cannabis

Source: The Scottish Government

SCOTLAND, United Kingdom – March 2012. Amphetamines (7.8 per cent) and ecstasy (7.2 per cent) were identified as the second and third most reported types of drugs ever used, according to the 'Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2010/11 – Drug use'. Only rates for cannabis were higher. The survey identifies the extent of self-reported illicit life time drug use, drug prevalence in the last year and last month and the experience of first drug use of adults aged 16 or over. Around 11.000 participants took part in in-home, face-to-face interviews, which are conducted annually measuring people's experience and perceptions of crime in Scotland. In 2010/11, fewer adults reported that they had used ecstasy in the last year (1.4 per cent) compared with 2009/10 (1.9 per cent) and 2008/09 (1.8 per cent). More than half (52.5 per cent) of the respondents reported using their drug of choice together with ecstasy.

22

Study on use of new psychoactive substance conducted in Spain

SPAIN – 26 April 2012. Users of new psychoactive substances (NPS) in Spain are polydrug users according to a study conducted by the Hospital del Mar Research Institute-IMIM-UAB (Barcelona) Spain, the Energy Control (Barcelona) and Puerta Bonita Health Center (Madrid). The cross-sectional structured survey was included in specific drug forums on the internet with a total of 228 Spanish NPS users participating. The most frequently used substances were 2-CB (4-bromo-2,5-dimethoxyphenethylamine) (79.8 per cent), methylone (40.8 per cent), 2-CI (2,5-dimethoxy-4-iodophenethylamine) (39.5 per cent) and mephedrone (35.5 per cent). NPS were frequently combined with other drugs such as cannabis (70.2 per cent) and ethanol (66.2 per cent). Most of them obtained NPS from friends (79.4 per cent) and the internet (41.7 per cent). Respondents (88.6 per cent) stated that they usually search the internet to obtain more information on the various NPS. This is one of a few studies on the use of NPS.

23

Brazil: Federal Police records largest seizure of synthetic drugs

Source: Policia Federal Brazil

BRAZIL – 5 July 2012. The Federal Police seized more than 74,000 ecstasy pills smuggled from Portugal, on two different occasions. Some 28,000 ecstasy pills were seized at the International Airport of Guarulhos - Sao Paolo, leading to the arrest of a Brazilian national, only days after a seizure of 46,000 ecstasy pills at Rio de Janeiro International Airport also arriving from Portugal (Lisbon). Following a search by the Federal Police, two blocks of ecstasy, 10,000 points of LSD and cannabis were seized in the apartment of the three suspects. This represents the largest seizure of synthetic drugs ever made by the Federal Police at Rio de Janeiro International Airport. The arrestees were charged with international drug trafficking and face a penalty of 5 to 25 years imprisonment.

24

Uruguay: increase control of pharmaceutical preparations containing pseudoephedrine and ephedrine


Source: California Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement

URUGUAY – March 2012. A new decree entered into force by the Ministry of Health of Uruguay providing controls on the sale of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine in order to prevent diversions onto the illicit drug market. Traffickers currently divert large amounts of both drugs in bulk and pharmaceutical preparation for the synthesis of methamphetamine. The decree ensures that the use of these substances are limited to scientific and medical purposes. Import and export authorizations are required for ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and will be issued by the health authority in Uruguay. Prior information on the need for importing and exporting those substances or pharmaceutical products containing those substances is needed by the health authorities.

25

Argentina increases efforts to prevent diversion of ATS precursors

SAN MIGUEL, Argentina – 26 & 27 April 2012. The first national meeting on chemical precursors organized by the Federal Drug Council of Argentina, in cooperation with the Secretariat for the Prevention of Drug Addiction and the Fight against Drug Trafficking, marks the effort by Argentina to actively fight the problem of the expanding amphetamine-type stimulants market in the country. The meeting was aimed at members of the judiciary, public prosecutors, security forces, police as well as provincial and national institutions involved in the fight against illicit drugs. The increasing complexity of the market for precursor chemicals and the dynamics that impact the development of the national and regional chemical industry have led Argentina to strengthen controls to prevent possible diversion of substances, materials and precursors into illicit channels.

26

Ecstasy use in combination with alcohol - a rising trend in Argentina

ARGENTINA – April 2012. Over 65 per cent of students (0.7 per cent of a total of 90,450) in Argentina have used ecstasy in combination with alcohol during the month preceding, informs the latest study on drug abuse carried out by the Argentine Drugs Observatory. The study is conducted every 2 years to estimate the extent of psychoactive substance abuse in adolescents between 13 and 17. Since 2011, lifetime prevalence of ecstasy has been increasing from 0.2 per cent to 1.2 per cent in 2005, to 2.1 per cent in 2007 and 2.6 per cent in 2009. The life time prevalence of ecstasy decreased significantly in 2011 and now stands at 2.1 per cent. The study also examined several risk factors such as school, family and social background that are associated with drug use and the perception of students about theirlives and their environment, which are essential in designing effective policies.

27

Guatemala: two ATS laboratories dismantled


Source: Policia Nacional Civil Guatemala

SAN MARCOS and SANTA ROSA, Guatemala – 19 March & 5 April 2012. Two clandestine laboratories manufacturing amphetamine-type stimulants were dismantled during two different operations in East and South Guatemala. In March, a methamphetamine laboratory was dismantled by the General Counternarcotics Directorate in coordination with the Public Ministry, in the village Sisiltepeque, Catarina, San Marcos (East Guatemala). Authorities found six plastic barrels that contained approximately 50 kg of a yellow solid, believed to be an intermediate product of methamphetamine. The second laboratory was uncovered in Taxisco, Santa Rosa (South Guatemala) leading to the arrest of a Mexican and a Guatemalan national. Quantities of sodium hydroxide and tartaric acid were also found in the laboratory.

28


Source: SEMAR

More than 146 mt of chemical precursors seized in West Mexico

MEXICO – 13 May 2012. A joint action by the Tax Administration Service, the Secretariat of the Navy of Mexico and the Attorney General's Office led to a total seizure of 130 mt of monomethylamine and phenylmethyl acetate, chemicals used in the manufacture of methamphetamine. The seven containers arrived at the port of Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacan (West Mexico), from China and were bound for Honduras. No arrests were made in connection with the precursor chemical seizure. This marks the first attempt in 2012, of precursors being trafficked from Mexico to Honduras. On 17 June another 16 mt seizure of the chemical precursor methylamine was made at the port of Manzanillo, Colima (West Mexico) onboard a ship from the Republic of Korea. The containers stored about 640 bags of 25 kg each.

29

Canada: study examines mortality among methamphetamine users

TORONTO, Canada – 13 May 2012. Individuals with methamphetamine-use disorders have a higher mortality risk than those abusing cannabis, cocaine, or alcohol, but a lower mortality risk than persons with opioid-related disorders. This new study conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, Ontario Cancer Institute Biostatistics Group, the University of Toronto and University of Arizona (United States) is one of the first investigating the mortality rate of methamphetamine users. Almost 830,000 individuals hospitalized in California from 1990 to 2005 with diagnoses of methamphetamine-, alcohol- , opioid-, cannabis-, or cocaine-related disorders were observed for up to 16 years. Age-, sex-, and race-adjusted standardized mortality rates were generated. Given the lack of long-term studies of mortality risk among individuals with drug related disorders, the current study provides important information for the assessment of the comparative drug-related burden associated with methamphetamine use.

30

US: President signs legislation that bans new psychoactive substances

WASHINGTON D.C., United States – 9 July 2012. President Obama signed new legislation banning the sale of new psychoactive substances. Numerous chemicals, including MDPV (methylenedioxypyrovalerone) and mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone) were added to Schedule I of the Controlled Substances Act, which lists drugs that are illegal and cannot be prescribed under any circumstances. The ban prohibits the sale of those chemicals in local and online shops. In addition, not only the compounds currently identified as new psychoactive substances are banned, but also analogues and mimetics that may be produced in the future are outlawed, creating criteria by which similar chemical compounds are controlled. The Senate passed synthetic drug control legislation in May 2012, after the House of Representatives had done so in December 2011 and the temporary emergency ban by the Drug Enforcement Administration in October 2011.

31


Source: US Customs and Border Protection

Some 2.5 tons of methylamine chloride seized in the US

LOS ANGELES, United States – 19 April 2012. U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers seized two shipments containing 2,591 kg of methylamine chloride which is used as a precursor for methamphetamine. The white powdery chemical was stored in 80 bags at an air cargo consignment facility of Los Angeles International Airport. The chemical could have been used to manufacture methamphetamine with a street value of USD 40 million. The shipments arrived from China on April 19 and 23 and were bound for Mexico. Methylamine chloride is controlled in the US and has many legitimate industrial applications in pesticides, solvents and pharmaceutical products. Suppliers of these products are subject to regulations and control measures regarding manufacture, importation, use and distribution.

32

US: one of the largest domestic seizures of methamphetamine (341 kg)


Source: Drug Enforcement Administration

SAN JOSE, United States – 1 March 2012. Some 341 kg of methamphetamine with a street value of USD 34 million was seized, making it one of the largest domestic methamphetamine seizures in history, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. The seizure was made in the course of an investigation on a case involving stolen electronic goods. Detectives of the Palo Alto Police Department Investigative Services Division discovered a large quantity of methamphetamine in an apartment in San Jose. A detailed investigation of the apartment revealed that it was being used as a methamphetamine conversion laboratory where methamphetamine was being converted to its crystalline form, "ice". Three individuals were arrested on state drug violations. All aspects of the investigation are ongoing.

Global SMART accomplishments for 2012

The Global SMART (Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends) Programme improves the capacity of targeted Member States to generate, manage, analyze, report and use information on illicit synthetic drugs. The programme launched formal operations in September 2008 in Bangkok.

Publications

- Global SMART Updates Volume 7 and 8 (English and Spanish);
- Illicit market for ATS, 2012 World Drug Report;
- West Africa – 2012 ATS Situation Report;
- Indonesia – 2012 ATS Situation Report (forthcoming).

Conferences and Meetings

- Side event on new psychoactive substances at the 55th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Vienna, Austria in March 2012; (co-organized with Australia)
- Fourth annual Global SMART Programme Advisory Group Meeting, Vienna, Austria in March 2012;
- Fourth SMART annual regional synthetic drug information workshop in East and South-East Asia, in July 2012.

SMART disseminated information on ATS and new psychoactive substances at:

- Third Operational Working Group Meeting on Operation ICE TRAIL, Teheran, Iran (Islamic Republic of) in January 2012;
- Joint session of the Enforcement Committee and Technical Committee of the World Customs Organization, Brussels, Belgium in March 2012;
- 2012 NIDA International Forum - Second interdisciplinary forum on new and emerging psychoactive substances by the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse and EMCDDA, Palm Springs, United States in June 2012;
- International Forum on Building an Integrated System in Dealing Professionally with Chemical Precursors, Dubai, United Arab Emirates in June 2012.

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If you have comments on this report, or would like to contribute information that should be considered for future reports, please contact the Global SMART Programme at **globalsmart@unodc.org.** Information on the Global SMART Programme can be found via the internet at www.unodc.org and www.apaic.org or by contacting UNODC at the Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, A-1400, Vienna, Austria.