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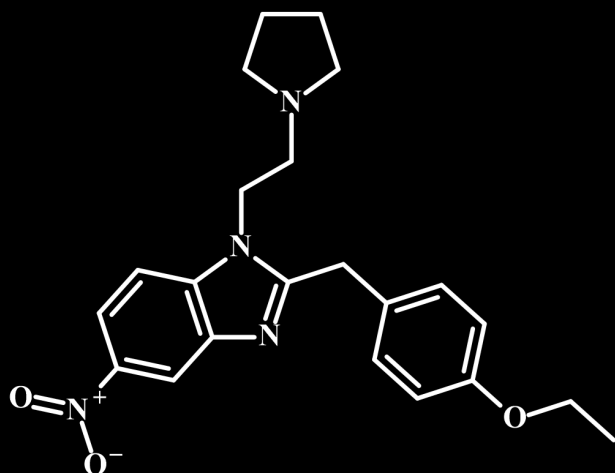



NPS

DISCOVERY

NPS Discovery Toolkit

» *N*-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene





Acknowledgements: This report was prepared by Sara E. Walton, MS; Alex J. Krotulski, PhD; Melissa F. Fogarty, MSFS, D-ABFT-FT; Donna M. Papsun, MS, D-ABFT; and Barry K. Logan, PhD, F-ABFT. Funding was received from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) (Award Number 2020-DQ-BX-0007). The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Purpose: The **NPS Discovery Toolkit** is a consolidation of our program outcomes into a comprehensive document detailing relevant information about the characterization of a specified novel psychoactive substance (NPS). This *toolkit* includes basic drug information, date of first appearance, prevalence, temporal trends, geographical trends, demographics, poly-drug combinations (including with other NPS), metabolism, methods for identification and confirmation, reference concentration ranges, and much more. This toolkit is designed to serve as a one-stop resource for scientists and interested individuals looking for all-inclusive information about a new drug.

About Us: The Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE, Willow Grove, PA) is a non-profit organization that operates a state-of-the-art laboratory with a mission to advance forensic science testing and knowledge. In 2018, the CFSRE launched "NPS Discovery" as a response to increased emergence and proliferation of new synthetic drugs, including those associated with increasing harms and adverse effects. **NPS Discovery** has grown to become a premier open access drug early warning system for timely information sharing among public health and public safety stakeholders.


* NPS Discovery welcomes collaborative partnerships with engaged agencies and communities impacted by the use of NPS. Individuals can contact our program to learn more about our advanced testing capabilities, to request information regarding sample submissions, and/or to join our growing dissemination networks.

Archives of Toxicology
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00204-022-03276-4>

ORGAN TOXICITY AND MECHANISMS



Pharmacological evaluation and forensic case series of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene (etonitazepyne), a newly emerging 2-benzylbenzimidazole 'nitazene' synthetic opioid

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New High Potency Synthetic Opioid *N*-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene (Etonitazepyne) Linked to Overdoses Across United States

Purpose: The objective of this announcement is to notify public health and safety, law enforcement, first responders, clinicians, medical examiners and coroners, forensic and clinical laboratory personnel, and all other related communities about new information surrounding the emergent synthetic opioid *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene.

Background: Synthetic opioids are chemically manufactured drugs, often accompanied with unknown potency and adverse effects or health risks. New synthetic opioids may be mixed with more traditional opioids, creating additional risk and danger for recreational drug users. Synthetic opioids may be distributed in powder or tablet form. In the United States (U.S.), an alarming increase in the number of deaths linked to synthetic opioid use has been reported. The primary adverse effect associated with synthetic opioid use is respiratory depression, often leading to death.

Summary: *N*-Pyrrolidino etonitazene (etonitazepyne) is a new high potency synthetic opioid bearing structural resemblance to etonitazene, a synthetic opioid that is nationally and internationally controlled. *N*-Pyrrolidino etonitazene is dissimilar in structure to other synthetic opioids typically encountered in forensic casework (e.g., fentanyl). Unlike the 2-benzylbenzimidazole analogues that were first synthesized and reported in the literature in the 1950s (e.g., metonitazene, isotonitazene), *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene does not appear in prior literature or patents. Recent *in vitro* pharmacological data suggest that this new opioid exhibits potency similar to etonitazene (~20x more potent than fentanyl). *N*-Pyrrolidino etonitazene was first reported by NPS Discovery in May 2021 following initial detection in a toxicology case. To date, eight blood specimens associated with postmortem death investigations in the U.S. have contained *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene; additional confirmations are pending. The toxicity of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene has not been examined or reported but recent association with death among people who use drugs leads professionals to believe this synthetic opioid retains the potential to cause widespread harm and is of public health concern. Identifications of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene have also been reported recently from agencies in Europe.

Demographics

Case Type:

- Postmortem (n=8)

Age:

- Range: 20s to 50s

Date of Collection:

- January to April 2021

Other Notable Findings:

- NPS Benzodiazepines (n=7)
- Fentanyl (n=4)
- Methamphetamine (n=4)
- *Only Drug of Interest (n=1)

[*N*-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene]

Case A	8.3 ng/mL*
Case B	2.4 ng/mL

Recommendations for Public Health

- Implement surveillance for rapid identification of drug overdose outbreaks.
- Engage local poison centers and clinicians to assist with treatment of affected patients.
- Track and monitor geographical drug distribution and trends.
- Track demographics and known risk factors for decedents and overdose patients.
- Raise awareness about the risks and dangers associated with opioid use.
- Make naloxone available to recreational drug users.

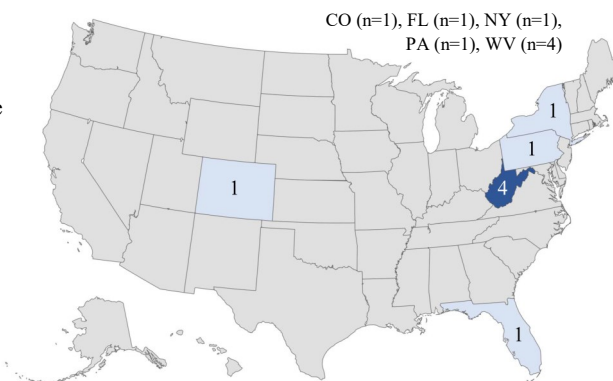
Recommendations for Clinicians

- Become familiar with the signs and symptoms associated with synthetic opioid use (e.g. sedation, respiratory depression).
- Naloxone should be administered to reverse critical respiratory depression and repeated naloxone administration may be necessary. Be aware that clinical conditions may change rapidly and unpredictably after naloxone administration due to precipitation of withdrawal.
- Be mindful that illicit drugs have limited quality control, containing undeclared substances that impact the expected clinical effects or findings.
- Counsel about the dangers of synthetic opioid products and other drugs.

Recommendations for MEs & Coroners

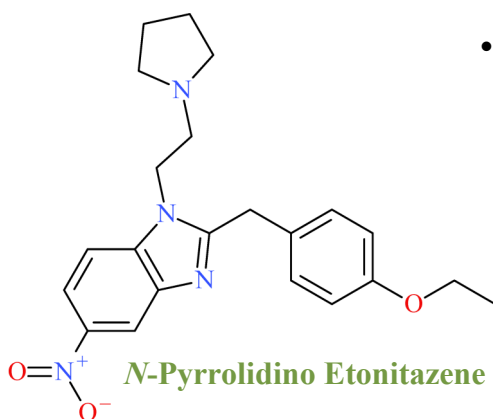
- Test for new synthetic opioids and their biomarkers in suspected opioid overdose cases.
- Be aware that ELISA screening for synthetic opioids may not be specific or specialized for the newest generation of compounds; consider mass spectrometry-based screening.
- Be aware that concentrations of synthetic opioids in biological specimens can vary and GC-MS sensitivity may not be adequate.

Geographical Distribution of *N*-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene



Recommendations for Laboratories

- Utilize analytical data available publicly for the identification of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene if a reference standard is not immediately available.
- Utilize previously developed non-targeted testing protocols or develop sensitive and up-to-date testing procedures for synthetic opioids.
- Prioritize analytical testing of seized drug samples obtained from drug overdose scenes during death investigations.
- Share data on synthetic opioid drug seizures with local health departments, medical examiners and coroners, and related communities.



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References and Related Articles:

- Hunger, A; Kebrle, J; Rossi, A; Hoffmann, K. (1957) *Synthesis of analgesically active benzimidazole derivatives with basic substituents. Experientia*, 13, 400-401.
- Hoffmann, K; Hunger, A; Kebrle, J; Rossi, A. (3 May 1960). [Patent US2935514A - Benzimidazoles](#).
- Vandeputte et al. (2021) *Synthesis, chemical characterization, and μ -opioid receptor activity assessment of the emerging group of nilazene new synthetic opioids. ACS Chem. Neurosci.* 12, 1241–1251.

Rapid NPS Testing Now Available:

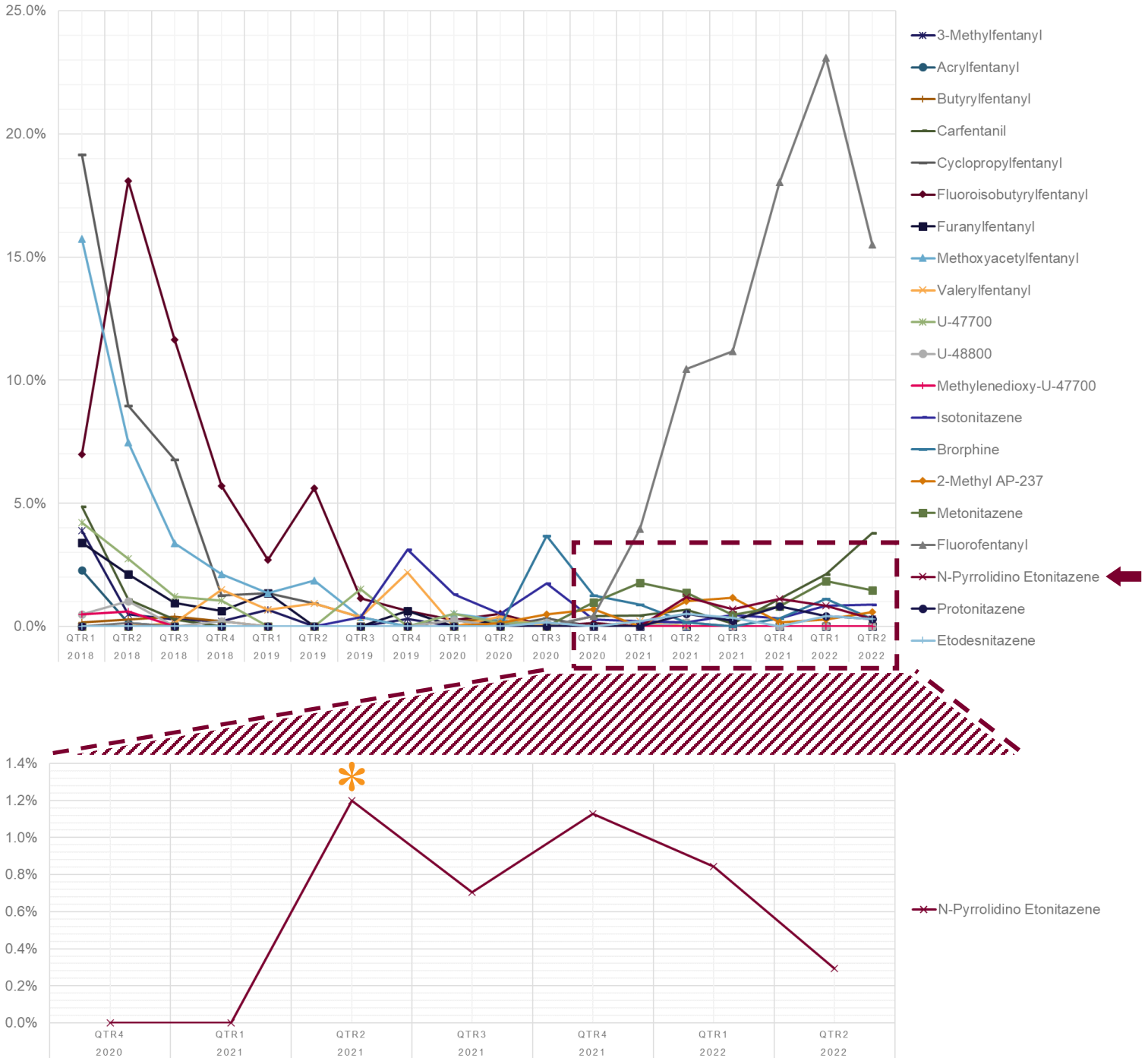
If your agency suspects synthetic opioid toxicity with no identifiable cause of death or your jurisdiction is noticing an increase in overdose patients requiring analytical testing, contact NPS Discovery at the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE); a non-profit organization in collaboration with local and federal agencies which can provide rapid testing after novel drug outbreaks in the United States.

Trend Plots: NPS Opioids

NEW

N-PYRROLIDINO ETONITAZENE — NPS OPIOID

NPS Opioid Positivity in the United States



* N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene discovered in the U.S. in May 2021

Note: Data generated by NPS Discovery at the CFSRE. Percent positivity (%) calculated by samples analyzed per quarter.

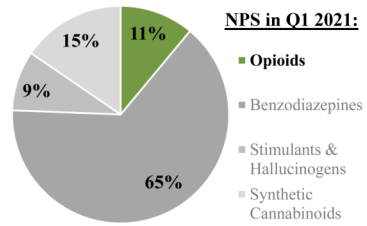
Trend Report: Q1 2021

NPS Opioids in the United States

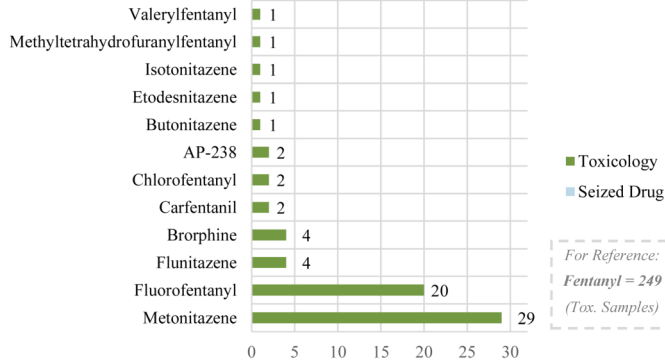
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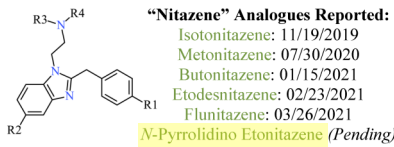
NPS Opioid Positivity



NPS Opioid Combinations

Combination	Frequency
Fluorofentanyl + Fentanyl	18
Fluorofentanyl + NPS Benzodiazepine(s) (e.g., Etizolam, Flualprazolam)	16
Metonitazene + NPS Benzodiazepine(s) (e.g., Clonazepam, Flualprazolam)	13
Metonitazene + Fentanyl	12
Metonitazene + Flunitazene	4

Continued Emergence of New Opioid "Nitazene" Analogues



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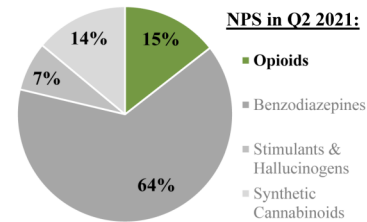
Trend Report: Q2 2021

NPS Opioids in the United States

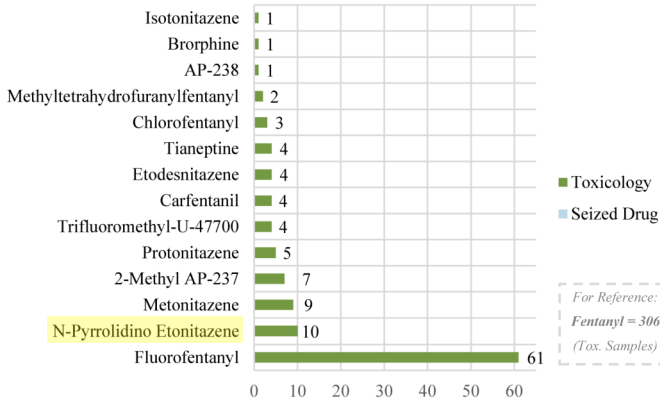
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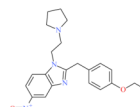
NPS Opioid Positivity



NPS Opioid Combinations

Combination	Frequency
Fluorofentanyl + Fentanyl	59
Fluorofentanyl + NPS Benzodiazepine(s) (e.g., Etizolam, Flualprazolam)	46
N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene + NPS Benzodiazepine(s) (e.g., Flualprazolam, Etizolam, Clonazepam)	6
N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene + Fentanyl	4
2-Methyl AP-237 + Etizolam	4

NPS Discovery Issues a **Public Alert** for **N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene** as Identifications Increase Across U.S. →



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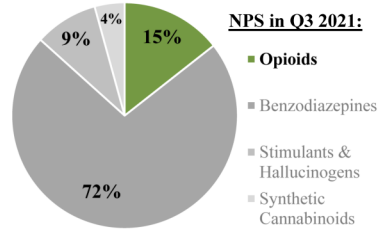
Trend Report: Q3 2021

NPS Opioids in the United States

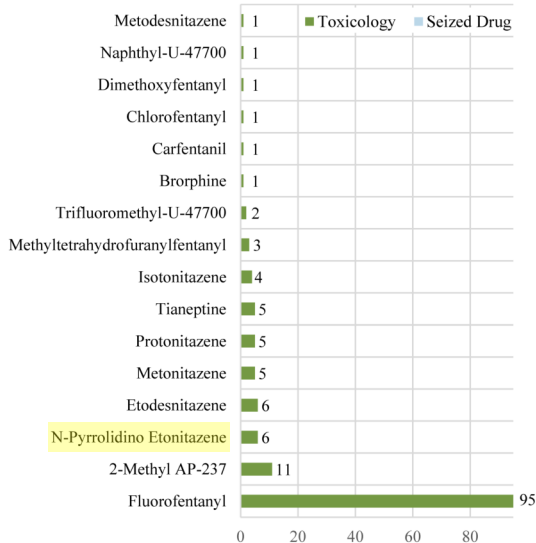
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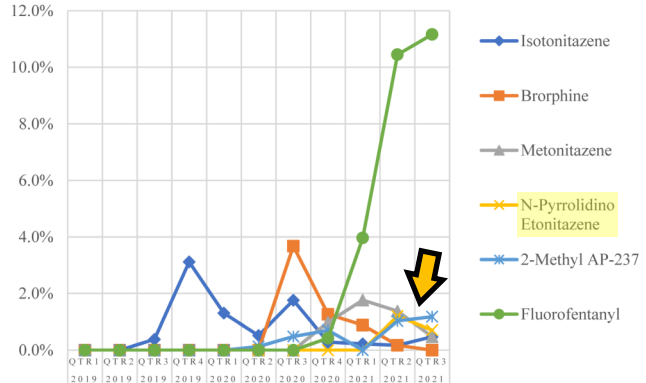
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NPS OPIOIDS IDENTIFIED



SELECT POSITIVITY SINCE Q1 2019



For Reference:
Fentanyl = 481
(Tox. Samples)

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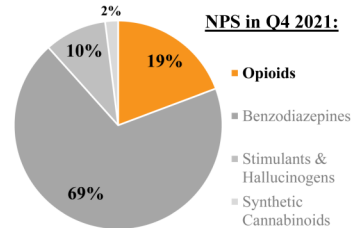
Trend Report: Q4 2021

NPS Opioids in the United States

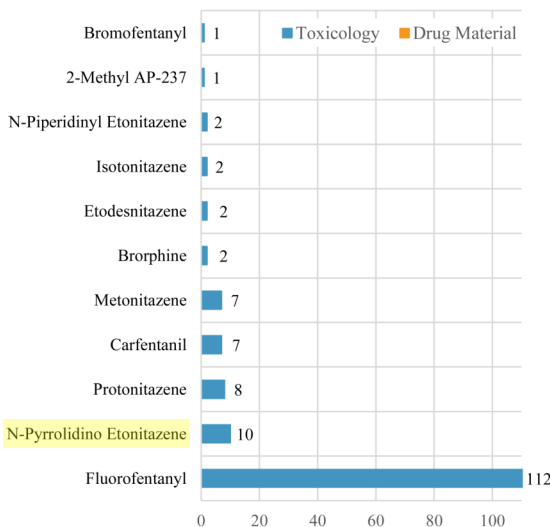
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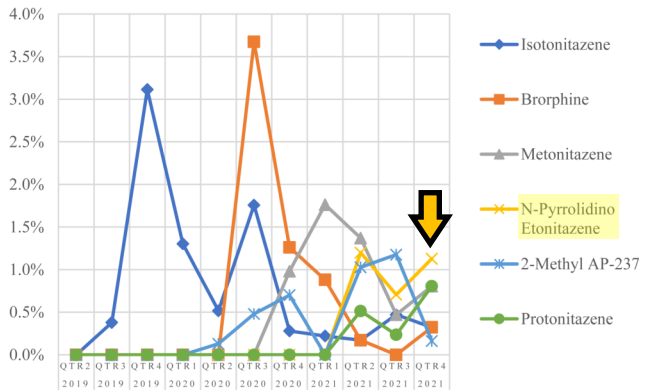
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NPS OPIOIDS IDENTIFIED



SELECT POSITIVITY: Q2 2019 to Q4 2021



For Reference:
Fentanyl = 388
(Tox. Samples)

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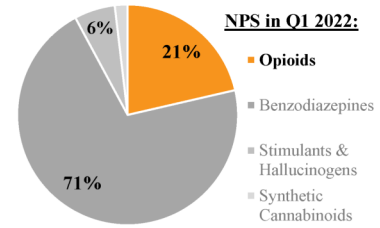
Trend Report: Q1 2022

NPS Opioids in the United States

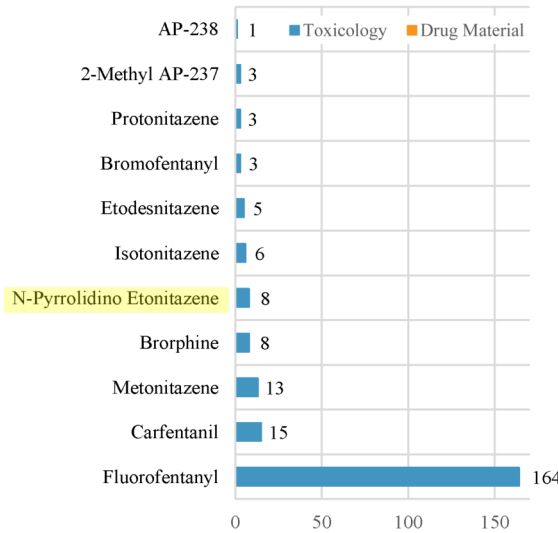
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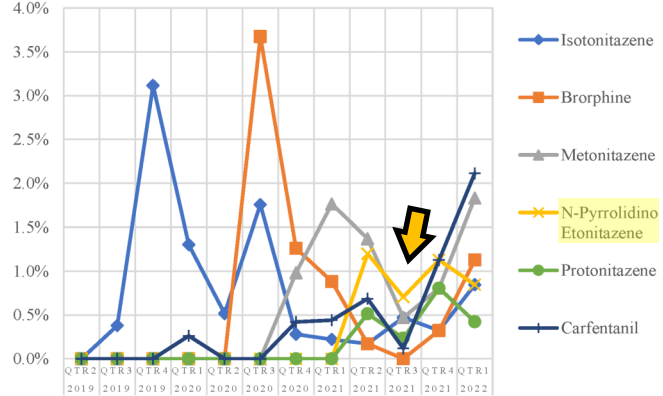
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NPS OPIOIDS IDENTIFIED



SELECT POSITIVITY: Q2 2019 to Q1 2022



For Reference:
Fentanyl = 476
(Tox. Samples)

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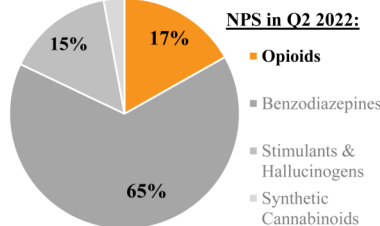
Trend Report: Q2 2022

NPS Opioids in the United States

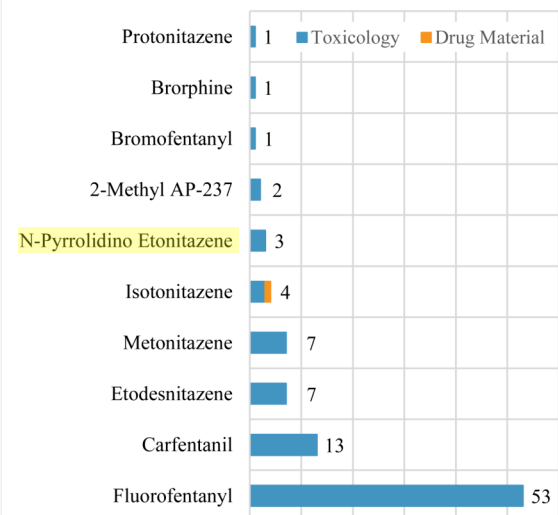
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Overview: Novel psychoactive substances (NPS), including NPS opioids, continue to pose great challenges for forensic scientists, clinicians, and public health and safety personnel. NPS opioids have been implicated in an increasing number of emergency room admissions, death investigations, and mass intoxication events, and often appear in combination with other illicit opioids (e.g. fentanyl, heroin). Maintaining a current scope of analysis can be challenging, requiring comprehensive analytical methodologies and reference materials for identification(s).

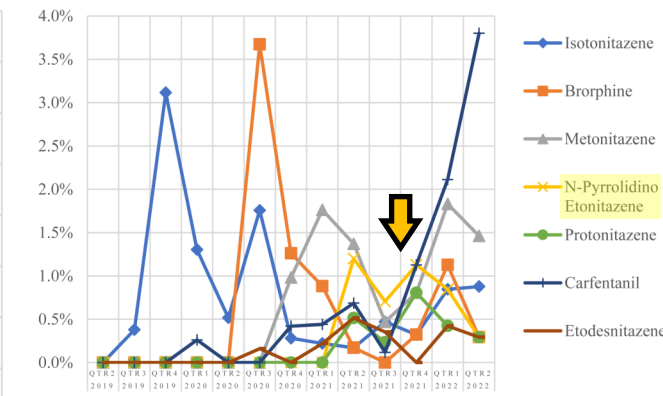
Objective: Our laboratory utilizes novel approaches for the analysis of drugs in biological samples and seized materials using comprehensive non-targeted data acquisition by gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GC-MS) and liquid chromatography quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometry (LC-QTOF-MS). The scope of analysis contains more than 1,000 drugs, including a vast majority of NPS and their metabolites. This approach allows for real-time identification of novel opioids and further data analysis of important trends. This project was conducted in collaboration with the toxicology and criminalistics laboratories of NMS Labs. Forensic case types linked to these results include illicit drug investigations, medicolegal death investigations, and/or driving under the influence of drugs (DUID) investigations. The results in this report represent the total number of NPS identifications at the CFSRE during this quarter, including those from sample-mining, data-mining, and/or esoteric testing.



NPS OPIOIDS IDENTIFIED



SELECT POSITIVITY: Q2 2019 to Q2 2022



For Reference:
Fentanyl = 234
(Tox. Samples)

Acknowledgments: This report was prepared by Alex J. Kozulski, PhD, Sara E. Walton, MS, Amanda L.A. Miller, MEdS, DrABFT-PT, and Barry K. Logan, PhD, FAABFT at the Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE) at the Freddie Rieker Family Foundation. CFSRE's NPS Discovery program acknowledges scientists at CFSRE and NMS Labs for their involvement and contributions. For more information about our programs and reports, please contact NPS Discovery at npsdiscovery@cfsre.org or visit our website at www.npsdiscovery.org.

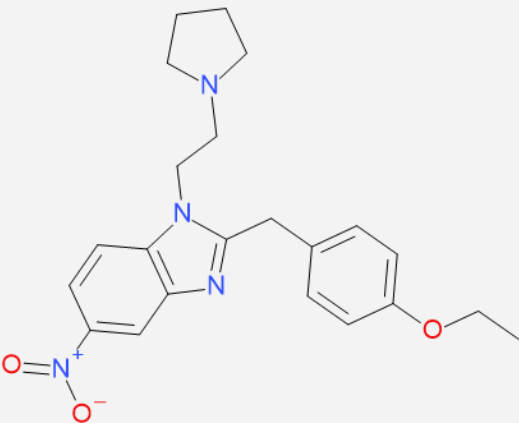
Funding: NPS Discovery at the CFSRE is supported in part by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (Award Number 2020-DQ-BX-0007, "Real-Time Sample-Mining and Data-Mining Approaches for the Discovery of Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS)"). The opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.



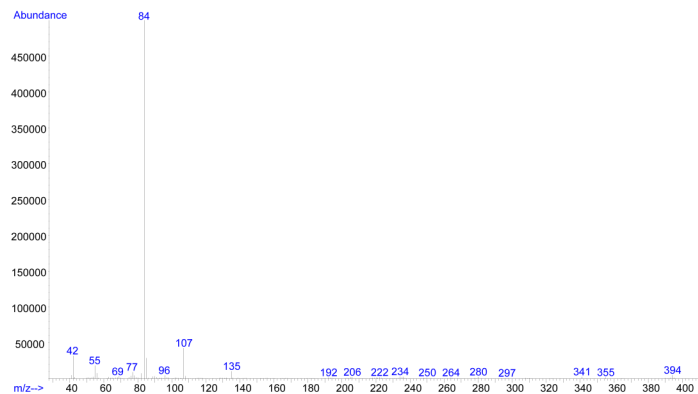
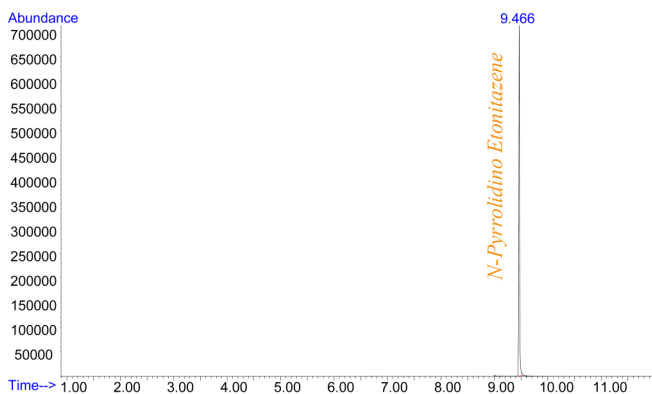
New Drug Monograph

N-PYRROLIDINO ETONITAZENE — NPS OPIOID

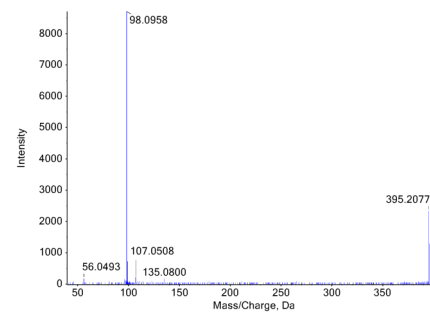
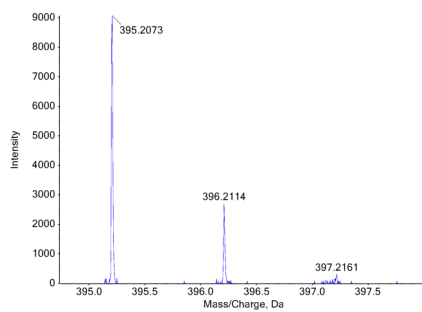
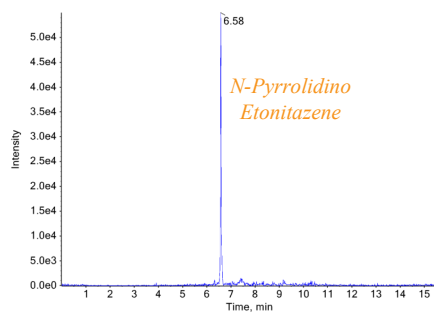
Reference: Information and data figures sourced from *N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene: New Drug Monograph* issued May 13, 2021, by the CFSRE.

 <p>N-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene</p>	Sample Type	Biological Fluid
	Date Received	March 2021
	IUPAC Name	2-[(4-ethoxyphenyl)methyl]-5-nitro-1-(2-pyrrolidin-1-ylethyl)benzimidazole
	CFR	Not Scheduled (05/2021)
	CAS#	Not Available
	Source	NMS Labs – Toxicology Laboratory
	Chemical Formula	C ₂₂ H ₂₆ N ₄ O ₃
	Molecular Weight	394.5
	Molecular Ion [M+]	394
	Exact Mass [M+H]⁺	395.2078

GC-EI-MS DATA



LC-QTOF-MS DATA



Analytical Methods

NEW

N-PYRROLIDINO ETONITAZENE — NPS OPIOID

Purpose: This section provides analytical methods for the analysis of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene. These two instrumental approaches provide a starting point for laboratories looking to development methods for this new drug, ultimately saving valuable time and resources. In addition, mass spectrometer setpoints could be used to initiate ion monitoring or novel surveillance prior to availability of reference material in the laboratory.

Agilent Technologies (Santa Clara, CA)	
Liquid Chromatograph: 1290 UHPLC	
Mass Spectrometer: 6495 QQQ-MS	

Waters™ Corporation (Milford, MA)	
Liquid Chromatograph: ACQUITY UPLC I-Class	
Mass Spectrometer: Xevo TQ-S micro QQQ-MS	

Liquid Chromatograph Parameters	
Column	Agilent InfinityLab Poroshell 120 EC-C18 (3.0 x 100 mm, 2.7 μm)
Column Temp.	50 °C
Mobile Phase A	0.1% Formic Acid in Water
Mobile Phase B	0.1% Formic Acid in Acetonitrile
Flow Rate	0.4 mL/min
Gradient	Initial: 50:50 A:B
	1 min: 50:50 A:B
	4 min: 5:95 A:B
	5 min: 5:95 A:B
	5.1 min: 50:50 A:B
	6 min: 50:50 A:B

Liquid Chromatograph Parameters	
Column	Agilent InfinityLab Poroshell 120 EC-C18 (3.0 x 100 mm, 2.7 μm)
Column Temp.	30 °C
Mobile Phase A	0.1% Formic Acid in Water
Mobile Phase B	0.1% Formic Acid in Methanol
Flow Rate	0.4 mL/min
Gradient	Initial: 50:50 A:B
	1 min: 50:50 A:B
	4 min: 5:95 A:B
	5 min: 5:95 A:B
	5.1 min: 50:50 A:B
	6 min: 50:50 A:B

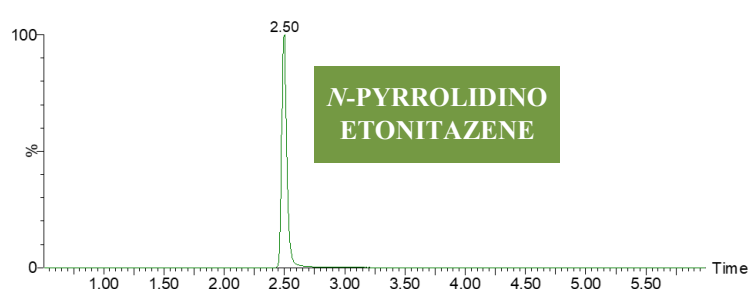
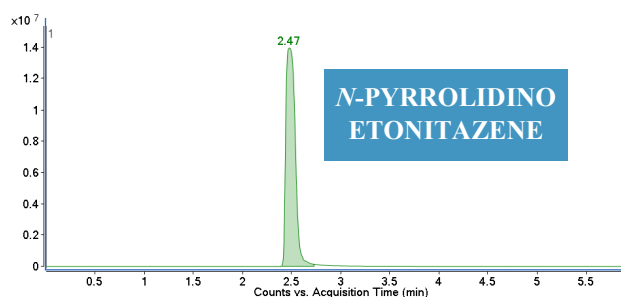
Mass Spectrometer Parameters	
Gas Temp.	250 °C
Gas Flow	16 L/min
Nebulizer	40 psi
Capillary / Nozzle	3,000 V / 1,500 V
Sheath Gas Temp.	400 °C
Sheath Gas Flow	12 L/min

Mass Spectrometer Parameters	
Capillary	2.5 kV
Desolvation Temp.	600 °C
Desolvation Flow	800 L/hr
Cone Flow	60 L/hr
Source Temp.	150 °C

*Suggested Quantitation/Target Ion

Multiple Reaction Monitoring (MRM) Transitions			
Fragmentor	MS1	MS2	Collision
380	395.2	98.0*	20
		107.1	30
		56.1	30

Multiple Reaction Monitoring (MRM) Transitions			
Cone	MS1	MS2	Collision
58	395.2	98.0*	22
		107.0	56
		135.1	26



NEW

Analytical Methods

N-PYRROLIDINO ETONITAZENE — NPS OPIOID

Purpose: Twenty-one authentic forensic postmortem cases were analyzed via LC-QTOF-MS and LC-QQQ-MS to determine quantitative concentrations of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene in biological specimens and poly-drug co-occurrence among these medicolegal death investigations.

Reference: Vandeputte MM, Krotulski AJ, Walther D, Glatfelter GC, Papsun DM, Walton SE, Logan BK, Baumann MH, Stove CP. Pharmacological Evaluation and Forensic Case Series of *N*-Pyrrolidino Etonitazene (Etonitazepyne), a Newly Emerging 2-Benzylbenzimidazole ‘Nitazene’ Synthetic Opioid. *Archives of Toxicology*. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00204-022-03276-4>

Poly-Drug Co-Occurrence	
Fentanyl	12 (57%)
Methamphetamine	12 (57%)
NPS Benzodiazepines (e.g., Flualprazolam, Clonazolam, Etizolam)	11 (52%)
Only Opioid	7 (33%)

Quantitative Concentrations* (ng/mL)		
Matrix ▶	Blood (n=15)	Urine (n=1)
Mean	2.5	1.5
Std. Dev.	1.9	N/A
Median	2.2	N/A
Min.	0.3	N/A
Max.	8.3	N/A

*Excluding outlier at 25 ng/mL in blood

Purpose: This section provides two example sample preparation workflows for the extraction of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene from biological specimens. These preparation approaches provide a starting point for laboratories looking to assess extraction methods for this new drug, ultimately saving valuable time and resources. These extraction method could serve useful for screening or confirmation, whether quantitative or qualitative.

Liquid-Liquid Extraction (LLE)

1. Aliquot 0.5 mL of sample (e.g., blood, urine)
2. Add internal standard (e.g., fentanyl-D5)
3. Add 1 mL Borax buffer (pH 10.4), vortex
4. Add 3 mL n-butyl chloride and ethyl acetate (70:30, v:v)
5. Cap and rotate for 10 mins
6. Centrifuge 4600 rpm for 15 mins
7. Transfer supernatant (e.g., freeze pour)
8. Evaporate to dryness at 35 °C (10 psi)
9. Reconstitute for LC-QQQ-MS analysis
10. Transfer to autosampler vials

LLE Assessment (Blood)	
Recovery	87%
Matrix Effects	139%
Process Efficiency	122%

Calculations (Using Peak Area Ratio)

Recovery: $(\text{Pre-spike} / \text{Post-Spike}) \times 100$

Matrix Effects: $(\text{Post-spike} / \text{Unextracted}) \times 100$

Process Efficiency: $(\text{Pre-spike} / \text{Unextracted}) \times 100$

Solid-Phase Extraction (SPE)

1. Aliquot 0.5 mL of sample (e.g., blood, urine)
2. Add internal standard (e.g., fentanyl-D5)
3. Add 3 mL phosphate buffer (0.1 M, pH 6), vortex, and centrifuge at 3000 rpm for 10 mins
4. SPE with UCT Clean Screen® (130 mg, 3 mL)
5. Condition: 3 mL MeOH, 3 mL H₂O, and 1 mL phosphate buffer (0.1 M, pH 6)
6. Transfer samples to cartridges
7. Wash: 3 mL H₂O, 1 mL acetic acid (0.1 M), and 3 mL MeOH, followed by drying for 5 minutes
8. Elute: Twice with 1 mL ethyl acetate, acetonitrile, and ammonium hydroxide (78:20:2, v:v:v)
9. Evaporate to dryness at 40 °C (10 psi)
10. Reconstitute for LC-QQQ-MS analysis
11. Transfer to autosampler vials

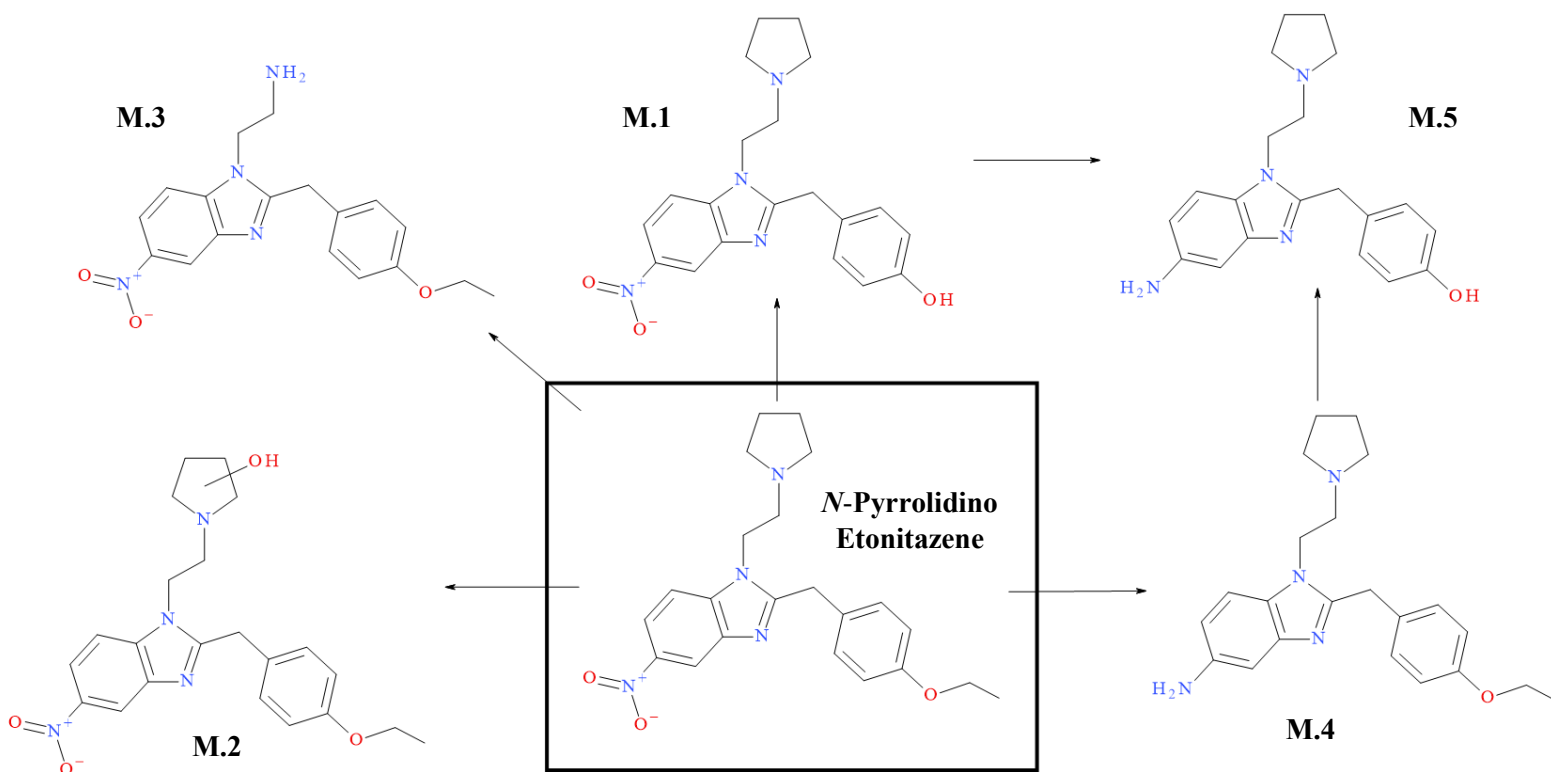
SPE Assessment (Blood)	
Recovery	84%
Matrix Effects	87%
Process Efficiency	73%

Metabolism

NEW

N-PYRROLIDINO ETONITAZENE — NPS OPIOID

Purpose: The primary metabolites of *N*-pyrrolidino etonitazene were investigated through *in vivo* experiments. Analysis was performed using a SCIEX TripleTOF® 5600+ LC-QTOF-MS (Framingham, MA).



ID	Biotransformation	Formula	RT (min)	Exact [M+H] ⁺	Measured [M+H] ⁺	Mass Error (ppm)	Diagnostic Product Ions
P.0	<i>N</i> -Pyrrolidino Etonitazene	C ₂₂ H ₂₆ N ₄ O ₃	6.64	395.2078	395.2084	1.7	98.0958 135.0782
M.1	<i>O</i> -Dealkylation	C ₂₀ H ₂₂ N ₄ O ₃	5.15	367.1765	367.1768	0.9	98.0959 56.0475
M.2	Oxidation	C ₂₂ H ₂₆ N ₄ O ₄	6.44	411.2027	411.2023	-1.0	114.0908 96.0765
M.3	Loss of C ₄ H ₆	C ₁₈ H ₂₀ N ₄ O ₃	6.44	341.1608	341.1610	0.6	298.1137 252.1223
M.4	Nitro Reduction (Suspected Metabolite)	C ₂₁ H ₂₈ N ₄ O	<i>N/A</i>	353.2336	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	98.0958 135.0782
M.5	Nitro Reduction + <i>O</i> -Dealkylation	C ₂₀ H ₂₄ N ₄ O	5.16	337.2023	337.2022	-0.3	98.0948

