



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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COUNCIL DECIDES PMMA SHOULD BE PLACED UNDER CONTROL

EU MEMBER STATES HAVE THREE MONTHS TO ACT

The **Council of the European Union** adopted a unanimous decision on 28 February defining the new synthetic drug PMMA (para-methoxymethylamphetamine) as a substance to be placed under control measures and criminal penalties in the EU Member States.

The decision, taken in the framework of the 1997 Joint action on new synthetic drugs, stems from recent findings on the health and social risks of the drug released by the **Lisbon-based EU drugs agency, the EMCDDA**. These are summarised in a risk-assessment report on PMMA adopted on 29 October in Lisbon by the agency's Scientific Committee and additional experts.

The report assesses the risks of PMMA, especially in association with the already controlled substance PMA (para-methoxyamphetamine). PMMA, is an amphetamine-like substance very close to PMA, and is almost exclusively sold in tablet form in combination with the latter and consumed as 'ecstasy'. It has been associated, in combination with PMA, with three deaths in the EU. PMMA is devoid of any therapeutic value.

Following the Council decision, and in line with their national laws, EU Member States will have a maximum of three months to introduce the necessary measures to submit PMMA to controls, according to their obligations under the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Unlike PMA, PMMA is not currently listed in the Schedules to this Convention.

The decision to control PMMA is largely due to the high risks of overdose associated with it, especially when combined with PMA. Users believing the tablets to be ecstasy (MDMA), and confused by their unusually slow effects, may be tempted to consume more pills and subsequently overdose. Also noteworthy are the serious risks resulting from mixing the drug with alcohol, MDMA, amphetamines and ephedrine.

Trafficking and distribution of PMMA have taken place in four EU Member States, three of which have information on the role of organised crime in the trafficking of PMMA/PMA. It is reported that 18,870 tablets containing PMMA have been seized in 29 incidents in the 15 countries. Large-scale production of PMMA does not take place in the EU. Two laboratories have been seized in countries of Eastern Europe and production is believed to continue there.

The Council decision confirms the effectiveness of the early-warning and risk-assessment mechanism provided under the Joint action. PMMA was detected on the European market via the early-warning system run by the respective networks of the EMCDDA and Europol.

This was the fifth-risk assessment procedure carried out under the Joint action. One synthetic drug, namely 4MTA ('flatliners'), was made subject to control measures on 13 September 1999. Other risk assessments involved the substances: MBDB; ketamine; and GHB.

Notes for editors:

For more on the Joint action, see:

http://www.emcdda.org/policy_law/joint_action.shtml

http://www.emcdda.org/activities/newsynth_jointaction.shtml

For the risk-assessment report on PMMA, see EMCDDA homepage:

<http://www.emcdda.org>

For previous risk-assessment reports, see

http://www.emcdda.org/policy_law/joint_action_nsd/risk_assessment.shtml

PMMA is currently regulated by law in four Member States: Germany, Ireland, Sweden and the UK.

This latest risk assessment was carried out by an enlarged EMCDDA Scientific Committee composed of its regular members, national experts and representatives of the European Commission, Europol and the London-based European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA).

Following adoption of the EMCDDA's risk-assessment report on 29 October, the report was submitted to the Belgian Presidency of the Horizontal Working Party on Drugs of the Council and to the European Commission for further action in accordance with Article 5 of the Joint action (procedures for bringing specific new synthetic drugs under control). The report was presented and discussed at the meeting of the working group on 11 December where it agreed unanimously on a proposal for a Council decision defining PMMA as a new synthetic drug to be subject to control measures and criminal penalties in all EU Member States. This followed a European Commission proposal of 6 December recommending control measures against the drug.

1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances:

http://www.incb.org/e/ind_conv.htm

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