



NPS

New psychoactive substances



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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The world is witnessing an alarming new drug problem – and much of the drugs are legal. Marketed as “legal highs”, “research chemicals”, “plant food” and “bath salts,” NPS are proliferating at an unprecedented rate and posing significant public health challenges. The total number of such substances, already estimated to be in the hundreds, is growing steadily. Mixtures of NPS bought unknowingly by users have resulted in unpredictable and sometimes disastrous effects.

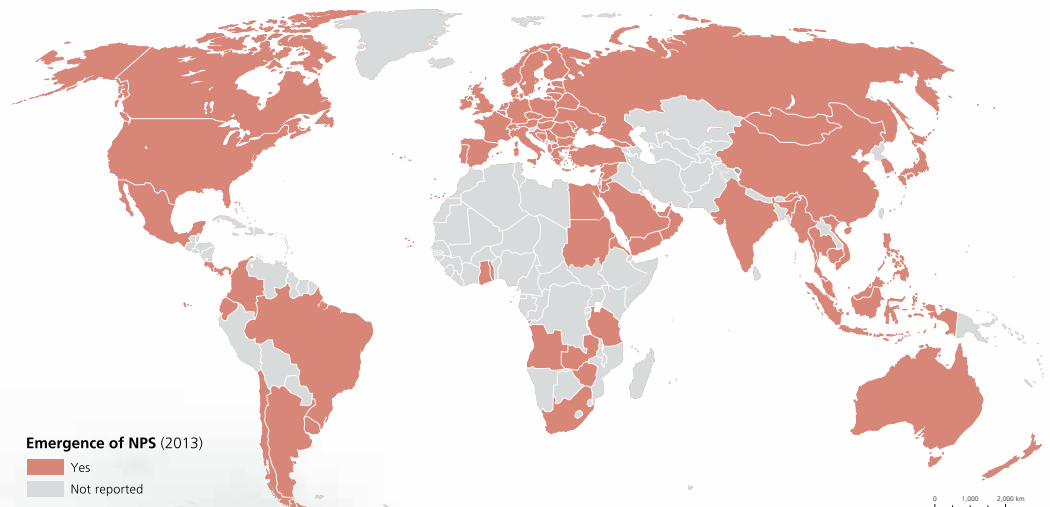
What are NPS?

These new psychoactive substances (NPS) have been known in the market by terms such as “designer drugs”, “legal highs”, “herbal highs”, “bath salts”, “research chemicals”, “laboratory reagents”. To promote clear terminology on this issue, UN-ODC only uses the term “new psychoactive substances (NPS)” which are defined as “substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled by the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a public health threat”. The term “new” does not necessarily refer to new inventions – several NPS were first synthesized 40 years ago – but to substances that have recently emerged on the market and which have not been scheduled under the above Conventions.

What are the risks of NPS?

The use of NPS is often linked to health problems. NPS users have frequently been hospitalized with severe intoxications. There have also been a number of unexplained suicides associated with preceding use of synthetic cannabinoids. In addition, substances like 4-methylmethcathinone (mephedrone), methylenedioxypropylamphetamine (MDPV), 4-methylamphetamine (4-MA) have been associated with fatalities.

Global emergence of new psychoactive substances up to December 2013:



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Early Warning Advisory on NPS (December 2013).





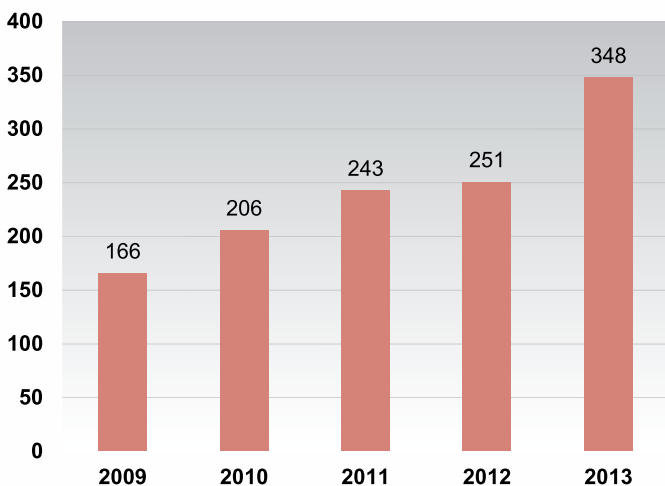
How widespread are NPS?

According to the UNODC report “The challenge of new psychoactive substances”, NPS have become a global phenomenon and all regions of the world have been affected by it. Over 90 countries and territories have reported the emergence of NPS.

How many NPS are there?

Up to December 2013, more than 340 substances have been identified based on reports by Governments and laboratories around the world as well as submissions through the Early Warning Advisory (EWA). This figure is greater than the 234 substances scheduled under the international drugs conventions. Technically, the number of potential derivatives is un-

Number of newly identified new psychoactive substances at the global level: 2009 to 2013 (cumulative):



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Early Warning Advisory on NPS (December 2013).

Note: For some substances reported in 2013 the reference period may have been August to December 2012.

limited. Continuous global monitoring on such substances is important, otherwise information on them will remain inconsistent.

What is the legal situation?

NPS are not under international control. Many countries have established permanent control measures for some substances or issued temporary bans. Only a handful of NPS have been reviewed by the mechanism established under the international drugs conventions. Responses in this area are likely to be most effective if they are coordinated across countries and regions. NPS are also a challenge for prevention and treatment. Objective and credible information is needed. In this respect, it is particularly important to create risk awareness among young people. Prevention measures should also target experienced drug users.

How can I find out more about NPS?

UNODC has reviewed the appearance of NPS in global markets and issued the first global overview of information on these substances and their use as well as a list of the substances reported to it in 2012. The 2013 World Drug Report has also dedicated its Thematic Chapter to this issue. On the occasion of World Drug Day on 26th June 2013, a secure online Early Warning Advisory was launched, to assist Member States in the identification of NPS. The EWA supplies the most up-to-date data on NPS and provides policy-makers and experts with a knowledge hub on NPS.





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The UNODC Early Warning Advisory on *new psychoactive substances*

UNODC, under the umbrella of its Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme, and pursuant to Commission on Narcotic drugs resolution 56/4 (2013) "Enhancing international cooperation in the identification and reporting of *new psychoactive substances*", developed the first international monitoring system on *new psychoactive substances* (NPS). The UNODC/NPS **Early Warning Advisory** (EWA) is the result of the continued development of the voluntary electronic portal of the UNODC International Collaborative Exercises, with the aim of providing timely reporting on the emergence of NPS and serving as a global reference point on these substances. In addition, this system seeks to contribute to an improved understanding of the patterns of distribution and use of NPS, as a basis for evidence-based policies.

To access the UNODC EWA on NPS, visit:

<https://www.unodc.org/NPS>

The Global SMART Programme is managed by the Laboratory and Scientific Section of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch. 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, PO Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria. Please contact the Global SMART Programme at globalsmart@unodc.org.

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