EMCDDA–EUROPOL ANNUAL REPORT REVIEWS NEW DRUGS ENTERING MARKET

Record number of new drugs reported in 2009, says report

(23.4.2010, LISBON) A record number of new drugs were officially reported in 2009 to the EMCDDA and Europol via the EU early-warning system (EWS) on new psychoactive substances. This is according to the EMCDDA–Europol 2009 annual report on the implementation of the three-step legal instrument through which Europe monitors and acts on new substances (1).

According to the report, released today, 24 new psychoactive substances were officially notified for the first time to the two agencies in 2009. This represents the largest number of substances ever reported in a single year and almost double the number notified in 2008 (13). All of the new compounds were synthetic, including two substances with medicinal properties. A full list of the substances notified is annexed to the report.

Highlighted as significant new developments in 2009 were the emergence of new, smokable herbal products laced with synthetic cannabinoids (the so-called ‘Spice’ phenomenon) and the growing popularity of synthetic cathinones. A total of nine synthetic cannabinoids, from four distinct chemical groups, were reported via the EWS in 2009, as well as four synthetic cathinones. The latter are derivatives of the parent compound cathinone, which is structurally related to amphetamine.

Towards the end of 2009, increased evidence of the use and availability of one synthetic cathinone, mephedrone (4-methylmethcathinone), prompted the EMCDDA and Europol to embark on a formal data-collection exercise on the substance (Step I of the legal process). This led to a joint report on mephedrone, submitted to the EU institutions and the European Medicines Agency in March, paving the way for a possible risk assessment on the drug (Step II) (2).

The appearance of a large number of new unregulated synthetic compounds, marketed on the Internet as ‘legal highs’ or ‘not for human consumption’, states the report, presents a growing challenge for monitoring, responding to, and controlling the use of new psychoactive substances.

The piperazine nCPP, extensively covered in previous years, is also given attention in this year’s report. Data from various sources highlight a marked increase of the percentage of ‘ecstasy’ tablets containing this substance, while the availability of MDMA on the market appears to be decreasing. It is noteworthy that no new piperazines or psychoactive plants were reported in 2009.

The report concludes that the EWS has high reporting capabilities and the capacity to triangulate information from different sources. Over 110 substances have been reported by Member States to the EMCDDA and Europol since the EWS was created in 1997.

Notes:

(2) On the basis of this report a decision may be taken on whether or not to launch a formal risk assessment on the drug. Article 6, Council Decision http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32005D0387:EN:HTML