



PRESS RELEASE

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction

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Council decides new drug 4-MTA should be placed under control

The Council of the European Union adopted a unanimous decision on 13 September defining the new synthetic drug 4-MTA (4-methylthioamphetamine) 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 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA). These are summarised in a 'Report on the Risk Assessment of 4-MTA' adopted on 19 May in Lisbon by the EU drug agency's Scientific Committee and experts.

The Report recommends that the drug be controlled largely due to the high risks of overdose associated with it. These risks result from the slow onset of the drugs' effects – often misinterpreted by users as the result of a weak dose, leading to the consumption of more pills – and their long-lasting nature. Also highlighted in the Report are the serious risks resulting from mixing the drug with alcohol, MDMA, amphetamines, ephedrine and certain foods.

Following its adoption, the Report was submitted on 24 May to the German Presidency of the Horizontal Drugs Group (HDG) 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 HDG on 18 June and, on 7 July, the Commission submitted a proposal to the Council calling for the drug to be brought under control.

Under this decision, and in accordance with their national laws, Member States shall take a maximum of three months to introduce the necessary measures to submit 4-MTA to control measures and criminal penalties as provided for under the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

This week's decision confirms the speed and effectiveness of the early-warning and risk-assessment mechanism provided under the two-year old Joint Action. The decision by the Council came just six months after first notification of the substance by the EMCDDA and Europol.

Before the summer, the EMCDDA issued a warning on 4-MTA to its national networks in reaction to misleading and scientifically unfounded media reports suggesting that 4-MTA is '33 times stronger than normal ecstasy'. The agency was concerned that this type of coverage may inadvertently promote use of the drug among ecstasy users and lead them to expect a relatively quick and dramatic effect.

4-MTA is generally found in the form of cream-coloured pills or tablets and has the street name 'flat-liners'.

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