

Large-Scale Attempts at Diversion of Acetic Anhydride

1. In the past 18 months, INCB has detected a massive increase in worldwide diversion attempts and seizures involving acetic anhydride, a key chemical in the manufacture of heroin. Numerous countries in Asia, Africa, South America and Europe have been targeted by traffickers searching for suppliers of the substance.
2. Acetic anhydride is listed in Table I of the 1988 Convention because of its frequent use in the illicit manufacture of heroin, but is also known to have been used during the process of illicit manufacture of methamphetamine and methaqualone. The chemical is also monitored by governments and international organisations because of its suspected use in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
3. As the same time, acetic anhydride is very broadly manufactured and used in licit commerce. Its licit uses include acetylating and dehydrating in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, manufacture of paracetamol (aspirin), textile sizing agents, cold bleaching activators, and the production of brake fluids, dyes and explosives.
4. Countries participating in Projects Prism and Cohesion, which are two international initiatives led by INCB, have been informed through 'special alerts' of specific details concerning the latest developments pertaining to acetic anhydride trafficking. It is still not clear however what is behind this surge of illicit demand for very large quantities of acetic anhydride and how these worrying developments link to illicit drug manufacture.

INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

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