

Internet-facilitated trade in precursors

1. Online trading, including online chemical trading platforms that offer their clients directories and databases of chemicals and chemical manufacturers from all over the world, has become an important tool for buyers of chemicals looking for a way to access remote markets in an efficient manner.
2. Such Internet-facilitated trade can take various forms. There are platforms that only provide buyer and supplier information, for a fee or free of charge, and are not involved in the business transaction, while other platforms may act as trading platforms that are directly engaged in the online sales of chemicals to their customers. A number of online trading platforms are only virtual market places where buyers meet sellers, and therefore the actual transactions do not take place through them; others may act as brokers.
3. Because of the widespread legitimate use of chemicals, online trading platforms similar to the websites of legitimate companies selling chemicals, including precursors listed in Table I and Table II of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988, can easily be found on the open web (also called the “surface web” or “clear web”). This differs from the anonymous online marketplaces on the hidden web (darknet) where controlled drugs are sold.
4. Often, owners or operators of online trading platforms might not be aware of the applicable control measures that may exist in the jurisdiction under which they operate. Internet-facilitated trade may not even be subject to control measures that are otherwise applicable to the physical movement of internationally controlled precursors during manufacture, import, export, distribution or end use. This makes the online trading companies and platforms vulnerable to exploitation by criminal organizations and traffickers seeking to buy or offering to sell controlled precursors as well as the equipment needed for illicit drug manufacture.
5. Article 12, paragraph 8, of the 1988 Convention requires parties to take the measures they deem appropriate to monitor the manufacture and distribution of substances in Table I and Table II that are carried out within their territory. From targeted time-bound operations, including operations “Eagle eye” and “Follow me”, the Board is aware of specific regulations and measures applied in some countries that relate to the use of the Internet to arrange domestic or international sales of controlled precursors. However, this information is not available on a systematic basis.
6. Governments recognized as early as 2000 that the continued advertising and sale of precursor chemicals (and controlled pharmaceuticals) for illicit purposes over the Internet was an international activity that needed to be countered. This led to adoption of several resolutions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. In its [resolution 54/8](#) (2011), the Commission invited Member States to take appropriate measures to strengthen international cooperation and the exchange of information regarding the identification of new routes and modi operandi of criminal organizations dedicated to the diversion or smuggling of precursor chemicals, including with respect to the use of the Internet for illicit purposes, and to continue to notify the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) of such information. In 2017, the Commission, in its [resolution 60/5](#), encouraged Member States, INCB, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and relevant international organizations to collect data, analyse evidence and share information with respect to criminal activities relating to precursors conducted using the Internet. It also encouraged them to continue to strengthen legal, law enforcement and criminal justice responses, based on national legislation, as well as international cooperation, to curb such illicit activities.
7. From a law enforcement point of view, suspicious requests for precursors posted on the Internet present a unique opportunity for competent national authorities to monitor potentially illicit activities. The information gathered can be further developed into actionable intelligence that competent authorities can use for further investigation and to prevent criminal activities.

8. This is where voluntary cooperation between national authorities and relevant industrial sectors provides a practical way to assist in the verification of transactions and in preventing the diversion of precursors from licit channels. There are some examples where Internet-based trading platforms have already implemented voluntary measures such as posting policies, under which trading in products that may easily be used for illegal purposes, including controlled substances and prescription and banned drugs, is not permitted.

9. INCB encourages Governments to cooperate with relevant industries, and with each other, to prevent the misuse of the Internet for the diversion of chemicals into illicit channels. The concept of voluntary public-private partnerships could be adapted to companies providing Internet-related services in order to collect, analyse and share relevant information about suspicious activities conducted over the Internet. INCB, through its various projects and platforms, will continue assisting Governments to promote such voluntary public-private partnerships.

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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For further information, please contact: INCB Secretariat at Tel: (+43-1) 26060 4163
Email: incb.secretariat@un.org, Website: www.incb.org