

Project Ion (International Operations on NPS)

1. In accordance with several CND resolutions, INCB through its Secretariat put in place an operational, intelligence-based, multilateral response to new psychoactive substances (NPS) in 2013, modelled on the experiences gained in precursors control. The work of the INCB in this area is known as Project Ion (International operations on nPS). Project Ion has a focal point network with 125 Governments and 8 international organizations. The NPS Task Force, composed of drug control experts from 19 countries and 6 international organizations, was also established to steer Project Ion activities. The Project Ion communication platform, known as Project Ion Incident Communication System (IONICS), was launched in December 2014 and has since grown to a user base of over 210 and more than 1,100 incidents communicated through it (as at 17 November 2017).

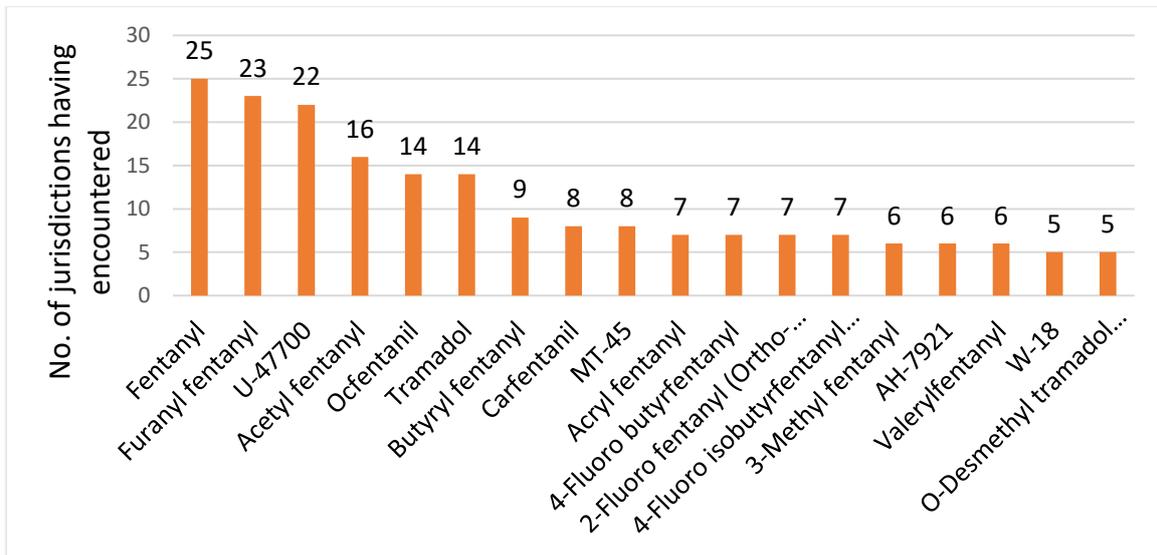
2. According to the UNODC early warning advisory on new psychoactive substances, the number of NPS detected to date is about to reach 800. While many of these detected substances are seen in the market for a relatively short period of time and disappear, a considerable number of substances continue to stay in the market. At least 76 different types of NPS have been seen since November 2016, according to incidents communicated through IONICS.¹ Member States and international organizations observe that the availability of NPS is still high while the pace of detecting new substances have been slightly slowed down.

3. The majority of incidents communicated through IONICS involve synthetic cathinones and synthetic cannabinoids. As some of these substances have been placed under international control in the last few years, incidents involving substances having yet to be under international control, for example analogues of alpha-PVP and N-ethylbuphedrone (NEB), are increasingly reported. Possibly in response to strengthened national control in countries in East Asia, which have been considered to be a major source of NPS, several seizures of clandestine laboratories manufacturing NPS start to be reported from other parts of the world, including Europe.

4. Prevalence of opioids appears to be spreading beyond North America. Since 2016, at least 25 incidents involving 5 types of fentanyl analogues have been communicated by countries in Europe through IONICS. The intelligence-gathering survey on illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogues, other opioid-type NPS and their precursors, conducted in January 2017 by INCB operational projects Cohesion, Prism and Ion, found that 40 types of opioids were encountered in 2015 and 2016 in 37 countries and territories, including 26 countries in Western and Central Europe. Please see below a chart indicating substances encountered in 5 or more jurisdictions. While countries in Western and Central Europe are over-represented in the survey results, as much more countries participated in the survey than any other sub-regions, it is at least certain that opioids of illicit nature are increasingly prevalent in Western and Central Europe than before.

¹ Please note that IONICS is designed and used as a tool for law enforcement authorities to exchange intelligence related to incidents. Therefore, the data quoted here should NOT be construed as a comprehensive picture of NPS prevalence worldwide in any sense.

5. In response to the survey, The Government of Sweden kindly shared a new modus operandi found in the course of investigation. Traffickers mixed various types of fentanyl analogues with liquid and distributed mixed products in nasal spray bottles. Photographs of spray bottles containing illicit opioid products are as attached below.



Illicit opioid products in nasal spray bottles



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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