

WHAT IS PROJECT ION?

Project ION (International Operations on NPS) is the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) international operational initiative supporting national authorities' efforts in preventing non-scheduled new psychoactive substances (NPS) of abuse from reaching consumer markets. A specific focus is on synthetic NPS with little or no known medical, scientific or industrial uses.

Project ION activities are primarily engaged in the coordination, collection and communication of strategic and operational information and intelligence related to suspicious shipments of, trafficking in, or manufacture or production of NPS.

WHAT WAS THE IMPETUS FOR PROJECT ION?

Project ION was born out of Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) resolution 55/1 entitled, "Promoting international cooperation in responding to the challenges posed by new psychoactive substances" of March 2012, resolution 56/4 entitled, "Enhancing international cooperation in the identification and reporting of new psychoactive substances" of March 2013 and out of a request by member States for tangible, practical solutions to the unique problems posed by NPS in the absence of an international framework for addressing the challenges posed by them. **Project ION** builds on the Board's successes with Projects PRISM and Cohesion and was approved by the Board in May 2013 with operations formally initiating on 1 December 2013.

In March 2014, member States formally supported the activities under **Project ION** in resolution 57/9 entitled, "Enhancing international cooperation in the identification and reporting of new psychoactive substances and incidents involving such substances."

WHAT ARE NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES (NPS)?

Although there is no universally accepted definition of new psychoactive substances (NPS), broadly they are referred to as substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled under the 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs or the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, but which may pose a public health threat. Some NPS may be under a patchwork of national controls.

These substances are often deliberately chemically engineered to circumvent existing international and domestic drug control measures. NPS can be man-made, synthetic substances, or natural materials and generally encompass several groups of substances, such as synthetic cannabinoids, phenethylamines, synthetic cathinones, tryptamines, etc.

WHAT PROJECT ION IS NOT.

Project ION is not engaged in research or data collection, health/toxicology assessments, trends analyses, regulatory responses, or technical assistance, such as forensic capacity building. It is not geared towards identifying emerging NPS encountered in Member States. Other national and international agencies perform these functions.

WHAT IS THE ADDED VALUE OF PROJECT ION?

Project ION establishes and maintains a mechanism for multilateral operational activities; enables and supports intelligence generation and dissemination (e.g., special Alerts) to national focal points; raises awareness to the threat of and practical response to NPS; strengthens international partnerships and cooperation; and provides access to the **IONICS** secure communication platform for the real-time sharing of actionable intelligence on incidents involving NPS between Governments.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TASK FORCE?

The INCB coordinates two separate Task Forces: one dedicated to precursor chemicals and one for NPS. The NPS Task Force proposes, directs and reviews time-bound special operations that generate and communicate strategic and operational intelligence regarding suspicious shipment of, trafficking in, or manufacture or production of NPS. The information and intelligence is exchanged through **Project ION's** global network of national focal points.

WHO ARE PROJECT ION NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS?

Project ION focal point(s) are nominated by their Governments to participate in the sending and receiving of relevant NPS information and intelligence, thereby enhancing timely communication and serving to improve the operational outcomes under **Project ION**.

Focal points are typically law enforcement in nature (i.e., Customs and Police), however Governments often nominate multiple focal points, such as various law enforcement agencies and a relevant regulatory agency.

WHAT ARE THE PRECONDITIONS TO BECOME A PROJECT ION NATIONAL FOCAL POINT?

Project ION focal points are encouraged to voluntarily participate in time-bound multilateral intelligence gathering special operations and to collect and share information with national and international agencies. Focal points should be in a position to actively:

- Receive and process domestic and foreign information and intelligence about transactions involving relevant NPS, as well as on interceptions and seizures relating to their manufacture or trafficking;
- Function as the country's communication and coordination entity for all other countries for the purposes of the operations; and
- Provide the most rapid feedback possible to requests from other focal points, the Board, and other concerned international (e.g., Interpol, World Customs Organization (WCO), etc.) or regional organizations involved in monitoring or investigating incidents involving NPS.



WHAT IS IONICS?

The **Project ION** Incident Communication System (**IONICS**) is a secure online communication platform dedicated to real-time communication of incidents involving suspicious shipment of, trafficking in, or manufacture or production of NPS. The platform:

- Offers fully customizable email “push” alerts informing users of new incidents such as suspicious shipments, illicit manufacture and production sites, and seizures of NPS;
- Provides registered users real-time information on NPS incidents worldwide, at no charge to governments;
- Provides contact details of the incident owner to facilitate direct contact and the launching of bilateral/regional investigations;
- Allows for both structured queries of past NPS incidents and “Google”-type searches enabling instant access to individual incidents details;
- Allows for the secure sharing of additional information such as shipping documents and photographs useful in an on-going investigation.

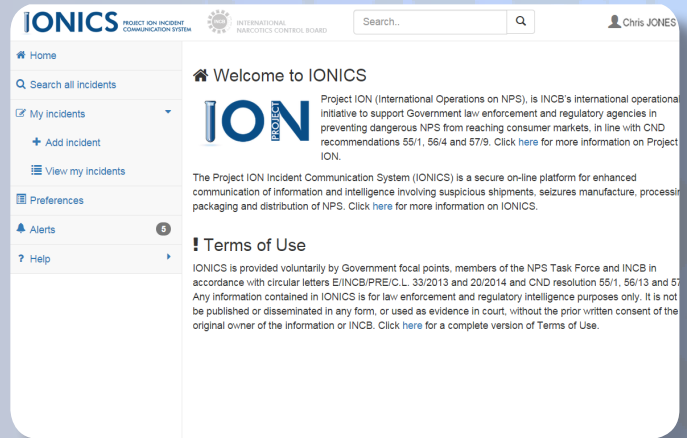


Photo: Screenshot of IONICS v1.0

HOW CAN I GET ACCESS TO IONICS?

National focal points, NPS Task Force members and those participating in special operations have access to **IONICS**. Other relevant agencies may request access through their established focal points, permanent mission or ministry of foreign affairs, or directly via INCB. Access to **IONICS** is not available to the public.

WHICH OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES ARE SPECIFICALLY TACKLING NPS?

UNODC gathers data (e.g., forensic information, abuse, prevalence, seizures and new legislation) and reports on NPS trends; raises public awareness of NPS; and provides technical assistance and support (e.g. forensics capacity). UNODC also maintains the Early Warning Advisory on NPS (www.unodc.org/LSS/Home/NPS), an online knowledge hub for NPS.

WHO evaluates substances for their abuse potential versus utility, and may recommend international controls of substances to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. Evaluations of substances are performed by the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (www.who.int/substance_abuse/right_committee/en/), whose main task is to carry out evaluations of the abuse liability of dependence-producing drugs falling within the terms of the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances.

As active task force members, Interpol and WCO assist in counter trafficking efforts by providing training, expert investigative support, secure communications and support for special operations to their respective law enforcement and customs members.



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
CONTROL BOARD

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT PROJECT ION?

NPS Operational Project
International Narcotics Control Board
Vienna International Centre
P.O. Box 500
A-1400 Vienna, Austria
Telephone: +43-1-26060

E-Mail: nps@incb.org

www.incub.org/incb/en/precursors/special_projects/Project-Ion.html

