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REPORT ON PRECURSORS FOR 2022

Three new chemical precursors under international control

At its sixty-fifth session in March 2022, the Commission on Narcotic Drugs included three new substances in Table I of the 1988 Convention. The chemicals 4 AP1, 1-boc-4AP and norfentanyl are used in the illicit manufacture of the highly potent opioid fentanyl. The international control of the three substances entered into force on 23 November 2022, bringing the total number of substances scheduled under Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention to 33.

Countries report a high number of seizures of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors

Sixty-seven countries in all five continents have now reported seizures of substances not included in the two tables of the 1988 Convention, indicating increased global trafficking of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors. Non-scheduled chemicals are used in the illicit manufacture of all classes of drugs except for cannabis. In the last eight years, 10 new substances, some of them designer precursors without any known legitimate uses, were added to Tables I and II of the 1988 Convention.

INCB, concerned about the global spread of non-scheduled chemicals, supports Governments in addressing this challenge, including through the work of the Board under articles 12 and 13 of the 1988 Convention.

Seizures of methamphetamine precursors continue to decline, despite increased availability of methamphetamine

Seizures of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, substances used in the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine, continued to decline. At the same time, the quantity of methamphetamine seized has increased, indicating that alternative precursors, including designer precursors, are used to manufacture methamphetamine illicitly. This trend is well established in Europe and is becoming increasingly significant in other parts of the world, as data reported to INCB suggest.

Drug trafficking organizations move cocaine processing to Europe

The discovery of 15 cocaine processing laboratories indicates that drug trafficking organizations are using new and sophisticated methods to smuggle cocaine base. Of the 15 laboratories, six were located in Europe, pointing to the trend that trafficking organizations are moving processing to this region. Generally, the laboratories that were discovered were set up to recover cocaine base hidden in carrier materials, which is then refined into cocaine hydrochloride with very high levels of purity.





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Heroin supply is not mirrored by seizures of its main precursor

Global seizures of acetic anhydride, used in the illicit manufacture of heroin, continued to decline, notably in countries that previously reported seizures of sizeable amounts of the substance. In 2021, Türkiye accounted for more than 60 per cent of global seizures of the substance. At the same time, trafficking in acetyl chloride, a possible replacement of acetic anhydride that emerged in 2018, continued to be of concern to the Board.

The Internet and its trade platforms are exploited by the illicit drug industry

Internet platforms continue to be exploited by drug traffickers to find and purchase the chemical precursors and equipment used to illicitly manufacture drugs. This development goes hand in hand with vendors who are using the Internet to illegally supply drug precursors. Monitoring the Internet and investigating suspicious online postings relating to precursors is essential to counter illegal sales of precursors and to investigate criminal networks. This was found in India following the INCB Operation Acronym conducted in 2021.

Enhanced approach to precursor control needed to address the evolution of illicit drug manufacture

The speed with which the illicit drug industry circumvents international controls on scheduled substances and the need for secure and uninterrupted trade by the legitimate chemical industry call for an enhanced approach to precursor control. To assist Governments, INCB has created a set of tools and services aimed at advancing knowledge at national and international levels. In 2022, INCB published the document “Proliferation of non-scheduled chemicals and designer precursors: Options for Global Action”. It provides a guide to Governments in their efforts to address the diversion of non-scheduled chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs and implement resolution 65/3 of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

In October 2022, INCB launched its new PEN Online Light platform to extend, on a voluntary basis, to non-scheduled substances the pre-export notification system in use for scheduled precursors.

