



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

VOLUME 1
March



**GLOBAL SMART
UPDATE
2009**

Regions covered in this issue



This report is produced by UNODC's Global SMART Programme which is designed to improve the capacity of Member States to generate, manage, analyse, report and use illicit synthetic drug information. With the use of synthetic drugs like amphetamine-type stimulants estimated to exceed the use of heroin and cocaine combined, and manufacture confirmed in approximately 60 countries, it is especially important to have a simple sustainable mechanism for frequent reporting of emerging information from different parts of the world. This brief semi-annual update highlights emerging information that illustrates shifts in the manufacture, trafficking and use of various illicit synthetic drugs. UNODC publishes a comprehensive analysis of synthetic amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) trends each June in the World Drug Report.

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) are a group of substances comprised mainly of synthetic stimulants amphetamine, methamphetamine (referred to by local street names as *ice*, *yaba*, *shabu*, *meth*, *P*, *tik*), and ecstasy-group substances (MDMA and its analogues). In various parts of this report, amphetamine and methamphetamine may also be referred to as amphetamines-group substances. In cases where reports to UNODC do not indicate a specific amphetamine-type stimulant, the term ATS is used. Tablets which are marketed to contain an ecstasy-group substance, but may actually contain a variety of other substances, are referred to as 'ecstasy'.

The information and data contained within this report are from official government reports or cases that are confirmed by UNODC field offices. Some information reported previously by UNODC have been updated where appropriate. Stories denoted with an asterisk (*) are from 'open sources' and UNODC is waiting for official confirmation, and therefore should be considered preliminary.

The boundaries, names and designations used do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. This report has not been formally edited.

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Pape'ete, French Polynesia, September 2008.

Reports of the arrest of a courier with some 467 grams of crystalline methamphetamine in 2006 led to the eventual discovery of a methamphetamine trafficking operation, and, in September 2008, 19 individuals were sentenced. The trafficking ring had operated for more than two years prior to its discovery in July 2006. Investigators estimate that up to three more kilograms may have been smuggled into the islands from sources in California. This case represents the first of its kind in the area known to UNODC.*

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Wellington, New Zealand, 2008.

New Zealand continues to be targeted by Asian criminal syndicates for significant illicit importation of the tableted form of the precursor pseudoephedrine (sourced primarily in China). Experts estimate that as many as 10 million pseudoephedrine tablets annually have been diverted into the New Zealand market. However, although hundreds of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories are dismantled by Police each year (on average 200), relatively small amounts of imported pseudoephedrine are discovered. This could point to larger, more sophisticated clandestine operations that, to date, have gone undetected.



Photo: New Zealand Customs Service

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Photo: Australian Federal Police

Melbourne, Australia, August 2008.

In early August the Australian Federal Police and Australian Customs completed a year-long joint operation resulting in the seizure of 15 million ecstasy tablets weighing 4.4 tonnes. This is the largest ecstasy seizure ever recorded. The ecstasy had been under surveillance throughout a controlled delivery from Italy to Australia in June 2007. ATS continue to be a significant problem in Australia where ecstasy use levels are among the highest in the world.

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Melbourne, Australia, July 2008.

Australian Federal Police and Australian Customs completed a joint operation resulting in the seizure of 850 kg of pseudoephedrine. The precursor chemicals were smuggled from Thailand inside a statue of an elephant, a marble box and brass stools, and was enough to manufacture in excess of 500 kg of methamphetamine.



Photo: Australian Federal Police

Subic Bay, Philippines, May 2008.

In late May operatives of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency and Presidential Anti-Smuggling Group Task Force successfully seized 745 kg of high-grade crystal methamphetamine, known locally as *shabu*, in the Subic Bay Freeport northwest of Manila. The drug was intercepted as the crew of a cargo ship registered in Viet Nam were found loading undocumented goods into vans in the port. The prime suspect is a foreign national that went missing during the investigation. The Philippines continues to have a serious methamphetamine problem with significant domestic manufacture and some of the highest rates of use reported to UNODC.



Photo: Hong Kong Customs

Hong Kong, SAR China, November 2008.

Customs authorities made a seizure of 307 kg of ketamine and 10 kg of crystalline methamphetamine at the Hong Kong International Airport. The contraband were hidden inside speaker equipment. Investigations continue into the shipment which originated in India and arrived via Singapore. Ketamine use is increasingly popular in Hong Kong. In 2008, there was an 18% year-on-year increase in serious narcotics offences in Hong Kong. This was driven in part by the increase in Ketamine-related cases, which increased by nearly 60% (1,555 cases).

Guangdong, China, August 2008.

The Drugs and Crime Investigation Team of Guangzhou seized one of the largest clandestine methamphetamine laboratories ever found in Guangdong and 1,700 kg of liquid methamphetamine. The laboratory was extremely sophisticated and included multiple large-scale reactor vessels (similar in design to those found in laboratories seized in Malaysia and Indonesia), wastewater and emission scrubbers, and a warehouse stocked with significant amounts of precursor chemicals. The industrial-scale facility was fronting as a chemical and paint factory with employees that did not know illicit drug manufacture was taking place, and the operators went so far as to apply for a legitimate business license to operate. The main building covered an estimated 4,000 square meters and three other sites were also seized as part of the operation. Thirteen suspects were arrested.*



Photos: Xinhua State Press Agency of the PRC

West Java, Indonesia, March 2008.

600 kg of crystal methamphetamine from Guangdong China, trafficked by a Hong Kong based syndicate, were seized in mid-March after being shipped by sea off the coast of West Java and transferred to speed boat for transport to a river side location in Cengkareng. One foreign national was arrested at a house after delivery and another was arrested at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport nearby Jakarta.

9

Vientiane, Lao PDR, 2008.

A 2008 study, commissioned by UNODC, found that the annual prevalence of methamphetamine use was 5.2% among secondary school, vocational school and university students in the capital Vientiane. In 2002, 4.8% annual prevalence was found for the same demographic group and the study authors suggest a more chronic drug situation now exists.



Photo: UNODC

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Photo: National Police Agency of Japan

Kitakyushu, Japan, November 2008.

Japanese Coast Guard and Police intercepted a Sierra Leonean-registered cargo ship trafficking slightly more than 330 kg of methamphetamine into Japan. The ship was detained on arrival in Kitakyushu port and two Japanese nationals and 12 Indonesian nationals were arrested. The seizure—one of the three largest ever reported in Japan—was nearly equivalent to all reported methamphetamine seizures for 2007. Investigations are on-going.

11

Quang Binh Province, Viet Nam, June 2008.

Police in Viet Nam seized more than 800,000 methamphetamine tablets (*yaba*) trafficked through Lao PDR to the Quang Binh province, 488 kilometers south of the capital Hanoi. Police had increased patrols along the border after being tipped off that a trafficking ring was transporting the drug from a production site in the border region of the Golden Triangle area of Myanmar. One arrest was made and three other suspects are sought in connection.

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Bangkok, Thailand and Vienna, Austria, September 2008.

Resident to more than half of the world's methamphetamine users, the region of East Asia and the Pacific is ground zero in the fight against the spread of amphetamines and other synthetic drugs. The first phase of the Global SMART Programme was launched in Bangkok, Thailand and UNODC HQ Vienna, Austria to assist Member States and regions vulnerable to the manufacture, trafficking and use of synthetic drugs. Global SMART is designed to improved the capacity of Member States to generate, manage, analyze, report and use synthetic drug information, and ultimately reduce the drug problem.



Photo: UNODC

Chin-Shwe Haw, Myanmar, February 2008.

Myanmar authorities seized nearly 8.2 million tablets containing ATS and arrested nine people in connection with the seizure. The arrests were made as the group was trafficking the drugs from Ho-Lee to Chin-Shwe Haw Myanmar, near the border with China. The tablets were hidden in 60 large sacks and were a variety of sizes. Forensic data were unavailable.

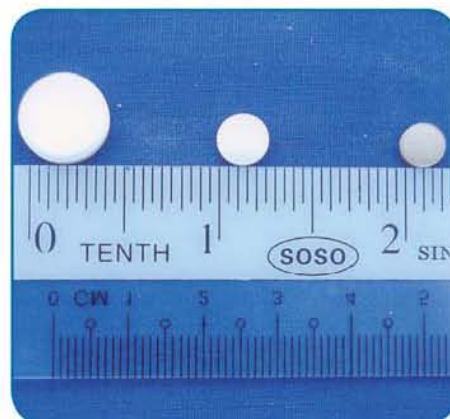


PHOTO: UNODC RCEAP

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Dhaka, Bangladesh, October 2007.

The Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion reportedly arrested one of the country's most notorious drug producers, and seized ATS-related chemical precursors and manufacturing equipment, 130,000 methamphetamine tablets (*yaba*), and crystalline methamphetamine. The seizure occurred in Gulshan, a prosperous suburb of the capital Dhaka, and reportedly led to an additional seizure for a total of 1.3 million methamphetamine tablets. Unconfirmed sources suggest that manufacture has been occurring in Bangladesh since 2000 but no official report of clandestine ATS manufacture has been made to UNODC.*

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Kosgama, Sri Lanka, May 2008.

Sri Lankan Police discovered what is believed to be the country's first clandestine methamphetamine laboratory in Kosgama, east of the capital Colombo. The sophisticated large-scale operation appears to have used ephedrine, imported by fictitious firms, as the precursor chemical. Equipment and large quantities of precursor chemicals were seized and five people were arrested including a Hong Kong national.



Photo: UNODC

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Mumbai, India, December 2008.

India's Food and Drug Administration reportedly unearthed a large-scale pseudoephedrine extraction operation in Mumbai. Officials raided three storage warehouses and seized more than 4,800 kg of methamphetamine chemical precursors. The operation involved the manager of a large pharmaceutical company who had diverted significant quantities of cold medication for pseudoephedrine extraction. The precursors were destined for illicit drug laboratories in Mexico. Two individuals were arrested, and several suspects, including nationals of Syria and Mexico, remain at large.*

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Vadodara, India, November 2008.

Following the seizure of 1.5 kg of methamphetamine, the Indian Narcotics Control Bureau subsequently seized an operational methamphetamine laboratory in Vadodara, Gujarat, India along with 30 L of liquid methamphetamine and 110 L of intermediate (unfinished) methamphetamine. The laboratory, located inside a chemical factory, was believed to be in operation for nearly a year. The drugs were destined for export to Australia. While several laboratories attempting to manufacture ATS have been intercepted in India in recent years, this seizure represents the first active laboratory confirmed to UNODC. Approximately 30 kgs are believed to have been exported prior to the seizure. In the days following the seizure, 7kg of methamphetamine were also seized in a related operation in Mumbai, India.

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Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 2008.

The Kyrgyzstan Drug Control Agency recently seized 45 grams of powdered methamphetamine, representing the first such seizure reported to UNODC. The last reported seizure of amphetamines to UNODC was in 1997. The 2008 seizure occurred in the capital Bishkek. Analysis determined the seizure to be an unusual *d,l-methamphetamine* sulfate form with 45% purity. Globally, methamphetamine is typically found in the hydrochloride salt form.

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Sanaa, Yemen, September 2008.

In November, Yemeni authorities burned more than one million amphetamine tablets that had been seized throughout 2008. It was reported to UNODC that more than 13.4 million tablets marketed as '*Captagon*' were seized in 2008. *Captagon* was originally the trade name for a pharmaceutical preparation containing fenetylline -- an ATS that is metabolized in the body to amphetamine -- but is no longer in production (limited forensic data suggest that tablets marketed as *Captagon* often contain amphetamine and other psychoactive substances). In a single event in August, Yemeni authorities seized 2.3 million *Captagon* tablets smuggled in water heaters, purportedly en route to Saudi Arabia. Numerous other countries throughout the Middle East are reporting increasing frequency and size of *Captagon* seizures.

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Amman, Jordan, December 2008.

Jordan experienced a dramatic increase in amphetamine seizures in 2008. Authorities are increasingly intercepting millions of amphetamine tablets marketed as '*Captagon*' coming from Bulgaria, Turkey and Syria en route to large markets in Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring countries. Preliminary data show that tablet seizures in 2008 increased by more than one third over 2007. Increases were also recorded in criminal drug cases and in the number of drug users coming to the attention of authorities, suggesting the possibility that trafficked amphetamine may be spilling over into the general population.

Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, March 2007.

Lebanese law enforcement authorities successfully raided several suspicious locations in the Bekaa Valley region, seizing equipment and chemicals for fake 'Captagon' (amphetamine) manufacture. The equipment was smuggled from Bulgaria to Lebanon for the purpose of Captagon manufacture. Three Bulgarians were arrested in connection with the seizure.



Photo: Lebanon Drug Enforcement Central Bureau

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Photo: International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine

Ukraine, 2008.

Ukraine has been reporting increases in injection drug use, particularly of synthetic stimulants. In the Donetsk region and others, home-made methamphetamine (*Vint*), methcathinone (*Jeff*), and cathinone (*Boltushka*) are often shared by young injection drug users in groups and have been associated with increasing levels of HIV in the country. The crude formulas often include unreacted potassium permanganate which has been linked to severe brain damage.

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Reykjavik, Iceland, October 2008.

Police in cooperation with Europol, dismantled a large, sophisticated illicit synthetic drug laboratory, which manufactured its own precursor chemicals from Benzaldehyde to synthesize amphetamine. The laboratory had the potential to manufacture hundreds of kilograms which were believed to be destined for the European market. This is the first clandestine drug laboratory in Iceland reported to UNODC in more than 20 years. A total of 692 grams of amphetamine and 20 kilograms of hashish were also seized, and three individuals were arrested.

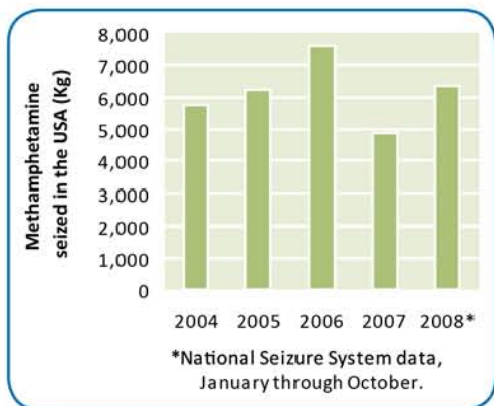
23

Ottawa, Canada, October 2008.

Canadian-sourced methamphetamine and ecstasy are increasingly exported to the United States, Japan and Australia. Officials warn that large-scale clandestine ATS laboratories are thriving in different parts of the country. In 2006, the government estimated that only 5% of domestically manufactured methamphetamine was exported, but in just a year that figure increased to 20%. This suggests that production has increased well beyond domestic demand, with excess trafficked to other lucrative markets.

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Source: US National Methamphetamine Threat Assessment 2009

Washington DC, United States, December 2008.

In the US Government’s National Drug Threat Assessment, experts warn that the country is experiencing an increase in methamphetamine availability due to a resurgence of both domestic methamphetamine manufacture and methamphetamine trafficking from Mexican-based drug laboratories. Seizures increased in 2008 after sharp declines in 2007. Both small and super-sized laboratories have rebounded in 2008, notably in California and in several other states. ATS drugs and precursor chemicals from Latin America increasingly make their way to US markets.

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Washington State, United States, January 2009.

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) has reported its first confirmed case of “candy-like” methamphetamine. The crystalline sample, seized in the northwest state of Washington near Canada, had a distinct grape candy-like odor and purple appearance, and contained low levels of methamphetamine (1.1%). While candy-like methamphetamine has received extensive media coverage in the US, this is the first confirmed sample reported by the DEA. This could indicate new measures used by manufactures to revive the declining US youth market. In 2000, UNODC reported vanilla-scented (ethyl vanillin) methamphetamine tablets (*yaba*) with comparatively higher levels of active drug in South-East Asian markets.



Photo: US Drug Enforcement Administration

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Mexico City, Mexico, 2008.

Mexico continues to be the destination for large-scale illicit precursor diversions, as syndicates attempt to circumvent a national ban. Several multi-ton shipments of pharmaceutical preparations containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine have been intercepted in Mexico or en route to Mexico, including a case involving 5 million ephedrine tablets seized in Belgium in November, and a case of 8.4 million pseudoephedrine tablets stopped from Taiwan, Province of China, in December. A previous shipment of similar size is known to have been sent from Taiwan, Province of China, to Mexico in late November. Clandestine methamphetamine manufacture may be rebounding after sizable declines even though an unprecedented 2008 national ban on nearly all forms of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine was enacted by the government in an effort to stem production.

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Photos: Ministerio Publico de Honduras

Tegucigalpa, Honduras, August 2008.

Anti-narcotics police broke-up an international network that manufactured methamphetamine-related drugs and trafficked their precursor into Mexico. Two methamphetamine laboratories — the first reported to UNODC in Honduras — were discovered in the capital Tegucigalpa, along with significant amounts of precursor chemicals and equipment. Seven individuals were arrested including Mexican and Honduran nationals.

Lima, Peru, November 2007.

Police discovered a clandestine ATS-related laboratory in a Lima home, the second recent discovery of synthetic drug-related manufacture reported in the country. The laboratory was operated by a transnational group of drug traffickers intending to manufacture methamphetamine-related chemicals, purportedly for export. Laboratory equipment, precursor chemicals and thousands of pseudoephedrine tablets were seized. Nine individuals were arrested in connection. The government has warned that pseudoephedrine imports have been increasing dramatically -- disproportionate to the overall increase in the illnesses for which they are legally used. Latin American countries are increasingly being targeted for manufacture of ATS because of the relative ease of availability of precursor chemicals and lack of awareness of the threat posed by synthetic drugs among authorities.*

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Buenos Aires, Argentina, July 2008.

Police discovered the country's first clandestine methamphetamine laboratory in a suburb of Buenos Aires. The laboratory was operated by transnational drug traffickers purportedly based in Mexico. Laboratory equipment and numerous precursor chemicals were seized. Nine individuals were arrested in connection with the seizure. Forensic data were unavailable.

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The Global SMART Programme was announced in March 2008 at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna Austria, and launched in September 2008 in Bangkok Thailand. Since that time the Global SMART Programme has initiated operations through:

- the selection and placement of a team in East Asia and the Pacific
- continued development of the Drug Abuse Information Network for Asia and the Pacific, the Asia and Pacific ATS Information Centre, and the on-line Forensic Alert
- data integrity work with Member States in East Asia; and
- the conceptualization and development of future Global SMART phases to assist Member States in South Asia, the Near and Middle East, Africa and the Americas.

Near-term future activities of the Global SMART Programme will include:

- conducting a regional synthetic drug information workshop in East Asia
- working with Member States and partners in East Asia and the Pacific to identify opportunities to build capacity to generate, manage, analyse, report and use synthetic drug information
- coordinating to begin operations and assist Member States in South Asia, the Near and Middle East, Africa and the Americas; and
- development of a comprehensive assessment of synthetic drugs in East Asia, the Pacific and South Asia.

UNODC would like to specifically recognize the following funding partners for their contribution to the Global SMART Programme.



The Global SMART Programme is managed by the Laboratory and Scientific Section of the Division for Policy and Analysis and Public Affairs. UNODC reiterates its appreciation and gratitude to Member States and partner agencies for the reports and information that provided the basis of this report.

If you have comments on this report, or would like to discuss information that should be considered for future reports, please contact the Global SMART Programme at globalsmart@unodc.org. Information on the Global SMART Programme can be found via the internet at www.unodc.org and www.apaic.org or by contacting UNODC at the Vienna International Centre, P.O. Box 500, A-1400, Vienna, Austria.