



D79 A Survey of Forensic Professionals and Law Enforcement on Synthetic Drugs

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After attending this presentation, attendees will gain an understanding of the prevalence of synthetic drug samples commonly observed in the law enforcement field and forensic laboratory. In addition, current testing protocols for the samples will be discussed based on information obtained from a given survey.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by highlighting the distribution demographics of synthetic drug samples in the United States, trends of synthetic drugs, and the laboratory procedures used for testing these samples.

In recent years, synthetic drugs have increasingly grown in popularity in the United States and subsequently, more samples are being seized and tested in the forensic science community. A survey was sent to a group of forensic professionals who participated in online continuing education courses from August 2010 through November 2011, regarding the prevalence of synthetic drug samples in their work environment. The questions in the survey were used to gather information regarding the frequency of synthetic drug samples by demographic region and laboratory testing capabilities.

The survey is comprised of the following questions:

1. In what state do you work?
2. Do you work for a local or state agency?
3. What is your job title?
4. Have you encountered synthetic drug (e.g., synthetic cannabinoids, and bath salts), samples in your position?
5. What synthetic drug compounds are you specifically seeing?
6. How often are you working with synthetic drug samples?
7. Do you perform testing in-house for synthetic drugs?
8. If yes, can you elaborate on your testing protocol?
9. If no, what is the protocol for synthetic samples in your agency?
10. What further information can you provide regarding synthetic drugs?

The survey was distributed to forensic professionals and law enforcement with ranging experience levels and job positions in order to gain a wide range of information. Due to the growing number of synthetic drug compounds and samples, it is important for the forensic community to understand and become familiar with the trends of synthetic drugs. Once trends are recognized, the forensic community can understand what they may be experiencing in the variety of compounds being seen and testing methods being used. Trends are important for law enforcement and analysts to be aware of in order to recognize what the drugs and their packaging look like, where they are sold, what drug compounds are currently controlled, how the samples should be collected, and what testing protocols need to be established. Because synthetic drug manufacturers can change the compounds that are being used or where they are distributed, it is important to have regional contacts in order to share information.

When information is shared amongst the field, progress can be made towards the standardization of protocols and methods. Legislation can build off of the standardization by working towards scheduling the entire class of synthetic drugs and not only single compounds and their analogs. By understanding current trends, the community may be able to determine future synthetic drug trends and be prepared for new drugs in the future. Preparedness is an important aspect in the forensic community, especially with drugs like synthetics, where a slight change in a compound can make an illegal drug, legal again.

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