



Criminalistics Section - 2016

B31 “I Dropped Acid.” “No, You Didn’t.” A Retrospective Study of NBOMe Emergence in Harris County, Texas

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the growing availability and use of the hallucinogen class NBOMe within the largest county of Texas. These drugs continue to grow in popularity in southeast Texas, despite fatal overdoses reported in Texas and elsewhere in the United States.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by showcasing a four-year emerging trend of a powerful and deadly class of hallucinogens. The data will show that users appeared not to know the identity or the danger of the substance they possessed. This information will be of use to other communities in helping to address emerging drug trends.

In the early 2010s, many “designer” substances appeared, including synthetic cannabinoids, substituted cathinones, and NBOMe, also known as “New LSD” hallucinogens, such as “25-I,” “25-C,” and “25-B.” The drugs became available inexpensively online and in retail outlets, reaching a young demographic. This, coupled with the high-potency NBOMe compounds, caused a serious public health concern. Some of the first reported deaths from these potent hallucinogens were found in Harris County, Texas.

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Drug Chemistry Laboratory first encountered NBOMe hallucinogens in January 2012 as part of a large seizure of various stimulant, hallucinogen, and cannabinoid powders. Since then, the number of incoming NBOMe hallucinogens has increased each year: 19 items in 2012, 67 in 2013, and 115 in 2014. It has been identified on blotter paper, in liquid and, on a few occasions, in solid dosage forms. Most commonly, small quantities for personal use are submitted to the laboratory.

Given the increasing number of small-quantity possession cases, despite increasing media attention on the harmful and potentially fatal effects of these drugs, it is hypothesized that many of those people found in possession of NBOMe hallucinogens did not know the identity of the substance and did not understand the risk. It was speculated that suspects often believed that they possessed LSD.

The offense reports of all cases that had tested positive for one of the NBOMe hallucinogens over the period from 2012 to present were examined. Demographic data, the location of the seizure, and suspects’ statements regarding the identity of the drug were gathered. These data were correlated with the charging information and the judicial outcome, and charging trends were looked for. As expected, suspects commonly claimed NBOMe was LSD or some other unrelated substance. Very few suspects mentioned “N-bomb,” “New LSD,” or “NBOMe.” These and other details of the study will be discussed.

NBOMe, Designer Drugs, Retrospective