



HIGH-LIGHT



ALCOHOL AND DRUG NEWS BRIEF FOR EMPLOYERS

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NEW CHEMISTRY, SAME BUZZ

A review of some new and lesser known drugs of abuse

Humankind's search for altered states of mood and perception has been as zealous and relentless as its quest to subdue and control its own and other species. Whereas many of the earlier discoveries of synthetic mood-changing drugs could possibly be ascribed to medicinal rather than pleasurable pursuits, the discovery and development of modern day recreational drugs is not necessarily rooted in such noble intentions – many of today's amphetamine-type hallucinogens are the products of an active and deliberate engagement of high tech chemistry in the search of new highs. In short, more than ever before mankind is showing its discontent with its natural state of mind and harnessing chemistry to plug the hole in its soul.

In this edition we will examine some of the lesser known synthetic and natural mood changing drugs which show up at clubs from time to time.

PMA(Paramethoxyamphetamine)

Paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA) which has both hallucinogenic and stimulant effects, is generally sold under the guise of Ecstasy or MDMA. It caused several deaths in Australia since 1994, and has been around the U.S.A. and Canada in a variety of forms in the mid-1970s. PMA has been reported to be the cause of three deaths in Chicago in May 2000. Pills

marketed as Double-Stacked White Mitsubishi in Chicago recently in fact contained no MDMA at all, but were pills of PMA.

The physical effects of PMA are similar to those of LSD but also stimulates the central nervous system and increases the blood pressure, body temperature, and pulse rate. It causes laboured breathing, high fever, erratic eye movement, muscle spasms, vomiting. At high doses PMA often causes convulsions, coma and death. It is regarded as the most dangerous hallucinogen and highly toxic.

PMA is more potent than MDA or MDMA, so that at a dose considered safe for MDMA, is highly toxic with PMA. In other words, a regularly sized pill that contains PMA instead of MDMA can be deadly.

In terms of the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act (No 140 of 1992) PMA is listed as a Part III drug (Undesirable Dependence Producing Substance)

4-MTA

4-MTA originated from research conducted by Professor Dave Nichols of Purdue University. There is little experimental data on its effects but it has been linked to one death in Holland and two in the UK (in at least one of the cases a number of other drugs had also been consumed). The cause of death may well have been serotonergic syndrome as 4-MTA is a potent 5-HT releaser and also a monoamine oxidase inhibitor.

The effect of MTA is reported to be similar to that of giving an MAO inhibitor

along with Prozac, a combination that is known to be very toxic and has also led to deaths.

A user who tried 125mg of MTA (purchased from a Dutch smartshop) described the effect as:

"not psychedelic, nor really stimulant either, neither fish nor flesh. I won't bother again and don't recommend it".

It is not clear whether this is currently an illegal substance in South Africa since it does not appear to be listed under the Drugs and Drug Trafficking Act.

KHAT

Also referred to as Quat or Cat, this drug is usually available in a natural or synthetic form. In its natural form it refers to the leaves of the shrub, *Catha edulis* which, when chewed, releases a mild stimulant, Cathinone, which induces alertness, increased energy levels and euphoria. The plant is widely cultivated in Somalia and Ethiopia and quat chewing is a legal and common recreational activity in many North African countries.

The active ingredient was isolated in 1970 and the synthesized version **Methcathinone** is much more potent .

This drug produces the same effects as amphetamines by triggering the release of dopamine molecules in the neurons and partially blocking its re-absorption. Stimulation can occur within 15 minutes of chewing though effects may only peak after 3 hours. The drug produces feelings of euphoria, stimulation, heightened awareness, increased confidence and energy levels. Following the high, a slight depression sets in and remains for a few hours. Respiratory and pulse rate are accelerated and blood pressure is increased. The long term hazards include the real risk of dependency, especially the Methcathinone powder and the development of an amphetamine –type psychosis. In a RaveSafe survey of 54 volunteers attending a party, 17% indicated that they have used Khat at least once before. In Cape Town Khat does not appear to be in common use at clubs.

OXYCODONE

Oxycodone is a semi-synthetic opiate and is available as a prescription painkiller under the trade name Percodan , Percocet or Oxycontin The drug can be taken orally or dissolved in water. Its effects are similar to the more common narcotic drugs and include drowsiness, euphoria, respiratory depression, cold and clammy skin, convulsions ,coma and death, usually by fatal respiratory depression. The drug also has a high potential for psychological and physical dependence. Whilst there has been a rapid increase in Oxycodone fatalities in Maryland,USA there has been no reported cases of Oxycodone use in Cape Town as yet.

GAMMA – HYDROXYBUTYRATE (GHB)

This drug was first synthesized some thirty two years ago by a French researcher and is classified as an anaesthetic . It usually comes as a white powder which is dissolved in water which remains clear and has a salty taste. It is also sold as a clear liquid in 30 ml bottles.

GHB soon became used not only as a general anaesthetic but also for the treatment of insomnia, narcolepsy and alcohol withdrawal syndrome. GHB also happens to be a powerful growth hormone stimulant and was widely used by the body building fraternity in the United States until sales were banned in 1990.

GHB is a central nervous system depressant and effects appear approximately 10 minutes after ingestion and may last for 3 to 4 hours The short term effects are similar to those of alcohol intoxication: loss of inhibition, a pleasant state of wellbeing and drowsiness, increased energy and muscle relaxation. With increased doses these effects ultimately result in muscle

incoordination, verbal incoherence, impaired breathing, loss of reflexes, coma and death. Mixing this drug with alcohol is particularly dangerous because of the synergistic effects of the two drugs.

It is not entirely clear whether this drug causes physical addiction or tolerance but, like in the case of all mind-altering drugs, the potential exists for psychological dependence.

This drug and its constituents have only been declared illegal in South Africa towards the end of 2000.

KETAMINE

Ketamine is also known as Special K, Vitamin K or just K and its chemical name is Ketamine Hydrochloride. It is an anaesthetic which is commonly used for veterinary purposes. Normally comes in white powder, sometimes in capsules or even a clear liquid.

The powder is taken orally or snorted and the liquid, orally or by intramuscular or intravenous injection. If snorted, effects start after 5-10 minutes (almost immediate if injected), or about 20 minutes if swallowed: first a powerful hallucinatory trip which usually lasts between twenty minutes to an hour when taken orally, thereafter a soft trip which will linger for approx. 2-3 hours after that.

Physical effects include loss of motor control (difficulty in walking, standing and talking), temporary memory loss, numbness, drowsiness, nausea. Ketamine is a strong drug which produces an "out-of-body" experience: in which the mind dissociates itself from your body.

It blocks normal thinking, memory recall and most sensory input. In the absence of external input, the brain tends to fill the void with a "new reality" - extreme hallucinations known as "emergence

phenomena". Ketamine causes physical incapacity as well as very hard trips.

Ketamine is much more powerful than equivalent amounts of speed or Ecstasy, and is highly dose dependent. An overdose of ketamine will result in unconsciousness, since overdoses can depress circulatory and respiratory systems to dangerous levels, sometimes causing death.

Because ketamine produces loss of motor control, it is dangerous to use it in uncontrolled environments. There have been reports of confused ketamine users wandering obliviously into traffic.

Because tolerance to the drug takes a long time to develop, ketamine has a high abuse potential.

ROHYPNOL

Rohypnol is a flat white tablet and belongs to the benzodiazepine class of drugs (minor tranquilizers such as Valium). It is used in the treatment of insomnia and as a pre-surgery anesthetic. The one side is imprinted "Roche 2" while the other side is scored with a cross. Rohypnol's reputation as the so-called "date rape drug" stems from a number of media reports implicating the substance in a number of rape cases.

The substance is slipped into the unsuspecting victim's drink and its sedative effects are aggravated by the concurrent use of alcohol. Once dissolved, the drug is tasteless and odourless and it soon leaves the victim with dramatically lowered inhibitions and a trance like state which renders her incapable of resisting unwanted sexual advances. (Even a dose as low as 1mg is capable of impairing the user even without alcohol.) Moreover, the misuse of the drug causes prolonged amnesia - ie, the individual cannot recall any of the events which occurred while she was under the influence.

'dissociative' at high doses, so this is not a unique phenomenon.

Unlike with LSD, large doses can be medically dangerous. Significant overdoses can cause serious constriction of the blood vessels in the extremities, possibly resulting in nerve damage and/or gangrene. The use of DOB can also be a problem for those with circulatory problems, heart ailments, glaucoma, hypertension, hepatic or renal disease, aneurism, or stroke history.

DOB can be dangerous if mixed improperly with other drugs, especially MAOI's or other liver-enzyme affecting chemicals. Mixing with stimulants is not recommended.

Is it illegal? In most places, yes. In South Africa, "4-meth1-2,5-dimethoxyamphetamine (DOM) and the derivatives thereof." are illegal, which most likely means DOB as well.

Comment

Judging from latest SACENDU (South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use, these drugs are not yet a major problem – at least not in terms of admissions for treatment and seizures and arrests. However, there can be little doubt that at least some of these drugs will eventually find a comfortable niche in the clubbing scene : A decade ago Ecstasy was virtually unheard of in Cape Town, but along with Crack and Heroine, it has steadily worked it's way towards increased popularity.

The disconcerting reality is simply that new generations of drugs are being churned out at a much faster rate than the dissemination of accurate, factual information on their toxicity and long term dangers.

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These events are usually only recollected in the form of erratic flashbacks 6 to 8 days later by which time the drug cannot be detected in urine. Rohypnol leaves the bloodstream in less than four hours and cannot be detected by urinalysis after 36 to 72 hours.

The street price of the substance varies between R1 and R20 putting it well within the budget of school going youths.

DOB (Dimethoxy-4-bromoamphetamine)

DOB is a psychedelic, like LSD, but it's a trip that lasts much longer. It's scientific name is 2,5- Dimethoxy-4-bromoamphetamine.

Just how long does it last? That depends on the dosage. Low doses can be over in 6-12 hours. Higher doses last for up to 16 hours, and heavy doses can last 24-30 hours. DOB takes a long time to come take effect : 2 hours is common, and it can be up to three hours.

The dosage is very small compared to Ecstasy, but quite large compared to LSD. DOB can come on a blotter, or in small pills. A light dose is under 1 mg, and a heavy dose about 3 mg, whereas with MDMA the dosage is typically 60 - 100 mg. Chemically it is closely related to Nexus (2CB) and to DOM (a.k.a. STP), and distantly related to MDMA (Ecstasy) and Speed. DOB's effects are a lot like those of LSD..

DOB by itself can be dissociative, but generally only becomes so at high doses. There are reports of people doing high doses of DOB and becoming extremely incoherent, delusional, taking off their clothes in public and running around, getting arrested, etc. Pretty much any psychedelic can become

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