

## Synthetic Drugs

# Pharmacological 'revolution' sweeps Europe, America

by Jeffrey Steinberg

**T**here will be in the next generation or so a pharmacological method of making people love their servitude and producing dictatorship without tears, so to speak. Producing a kind of painless concentration camp for entire societies, so that people will in fact have their liberties taken away from them but will rather enjoy it, because they will be distracted from any desire to rebel—by propaganda, or brainwashing, or brainwashing enhanced by pharmacological methods. And this seems to be the final revolution.”

—from a 1961 lecture by Aldous Huxley, at the California School of Medicine in San Francisco, sponsored by the U.S. Information Service's Voice of America

In February 1996, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration convened an emergency summit of law enforcement officials from across the country, to chart out a response to an epidemic-proportion jump in illicit methamphetamine (“meth”) use in the United States. Two months later, the DEA released a *National Methamphetamine Strategy*, which candidly admitted: “Trafficking of a highly potent form of methamphetamine has been on the rise in the United States over the past few years, and abuse continues to devastate many communities. Although still more common in western areas of the country, methamphetamine trafficking and abuse are no longer confined to any one region: Methamphetamine is spreading eastward. The production and trafficking structures now in place, if left unchecked, pose the risk that the nation as a whole will experience very serious levels of methamphetamine abuse.”

The *Strategy* noted with alarm, that, since 1993, large quantities of meth have been flooding the United States from Mexico. In March 1996, U.S. and Mexican anti-drug authorities captured a large and sophisticated meth lab in the Yucatan Peninsula, and seized one of the largest sup-

plies of the stimulant in history. Multi-drug cartels, in Mexico and Colombia, are now emerging as major suppliers of methamphetamine to the U.S. market (according to the DEA, the Cali and Medellín cartels have, for over a decade, been major suppliers of Qualudes, a depressant, to the U.S. black market).

Inside the United States, the growing involvement of the major international drug cartels in the meth trade has meant that methamphetamine distribution is being increasingly dominated by the same apparatus that trafficks in cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, and has vast smuggling, distribution, and money-laundering capabilities. DEA sources tell *EIR* that, this year, the California Highway Patrol has made seizures of pure methamphetamine that are larger than any recent cocaine seizures.

Buttressing the evidence of the recent emergence of the Ibero-American multi-drug cartels in the U.S. methamphetamine trade, is the following data, from the *Strategy* document: In 1992, federal agents seized a total of 6.5 kilos of meth at the U.S.-Mexican border. The following year, 306 kilos were seized, and in 1994, 682 kilos were confiscated.

But, the picture presented in the *Strategy*, although alarming, represents just the tip of the iceberg. Meth is but one of a growing number of illegal synthetic drugs flooding the American and world markets. *The National Drug Control Strategy: 1996*, produced by the White House, acknowledges that LSD and stimulant use by 8th, 10th, and 12th graders has increased by 82% and 37%, respectively, in the first half of the 1990s. And, the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (NNICC) annual report has, for several years, catalogued growing abuse of PCP (Phencyclidine), a powerful hallucinogen; MDMA (a.k.a. “Ecstasy”), a combination of methamphetamine and MDA (a strong hallucinogen); Methcathinone (“Cat”), a stimulant; and a growing number of “con-

trolled substance analogs,” more popularly known as “designer drugs.”

## The deeper crisis

The tremendous recent increase in Ecstasy abuse in the United States and Europe provides an alarming window into the deeper cultural crisis that the synthetic drug explosion signals.

The May 13, 1996 issue of the *New Federalist* newspaper featured an article by Carol Greene, “Techno-Music Will Destroy Your Brain,” exposing computer-generated techno-music as the latest, most mind-deadening, and fastest-growing aberration of the drug-rock counterculture. Greene wrote: “In Germany alone, approximately 2 million sadly bored and under-stimulated members of the middle-class, mostly students, sales personnel, administrative workers, and computer specialists, are members of the ‘rave society.’ Entertainment specialists in Germany estimate that 56% of the above go to a techno party once a week and some 22% even go more than twice a week.” The overwhelming majority of “ravers” use Ecstasy (MDMA) to throw themselves into a trance-like, but energized state, as they spend hours at the techno clubs, dancing in all-night, and sometimes weekend-long, dance marathons, to computer-generated, repetitive noise, playing at 85-120 decibels.

The techno “revolution,” like the earlier “Beatle-mania,” began in Britain in the early 1980s, and has now spread across Europe and the United States. The Berlin Love Parade in May 1995, a weekend “rave-fest,” drew an estimated 350,000 participants, courtesy, in part, of a massive advertising campaign, subsidized by Marlboro and Camel cigarettes, and Addidas sneakers. The Berlin event dwarfed Woodstock, by comparison. German authorities estimate that a half-million German youths participate in rave sessions every weekend.

The rapid expansion of designer drugs, of which Ecstasy is but one currently leading example, offers another crucial look into the future of Dope, Inc. In 1987, Dr. Joseph D. Douglass, Jr. and Neil C. Livingstone co-authored a book called *America the Vulnerable: The Threat of Chemical/Biological Warfare*. They wrote:

“One of the newer complications confronting both civil and military authorities is the spread of ‘designer drugs,’ high-tech heroin substitutes. These drugs are synthetics designed to mimic heroin—hence the name designer drugs. The drugs are exceedingly potent. The newest ones are up to four

thousand times more potent than heroin, and because they are new, they are not illegal. When one drug is identified and declared illegal, less than a month goes by before a new, modified—and legal—variant or analogue surfaces to take its place. And the process continues. The first fentanyl analogue, alpha-methyl-fentanyl, appeared in 1979 in Orange County, California. Since 1981, DEA laboratories have identified seven more fentanyl analogues. Authorities in California now estimate that 20% of heroin addicts are using the fentanyl analogues.

“One of the authorities in the field, Dr. Gary Henderson (a pharmacologist and toxicologist at the University of California, Davis), believes that a world-class medicinal chemist has been responsible for the many analogues of fentanyl that have appeared. . . . The drugs are very pure, and the doses are very uniform. . . . The quality is comparable to what one might expect if the source were a pharmaceutical plant rather than a clandestine basement laboratory.”

Douglass and Livingstone then warned: “Because the designer drugs are so potent, tracking the substances down is exceedingly difficult and getting worse. A two-hundred gram batch of fentanyl (less than a half a pound) represents a lifetime supply of two hundred million doses. This potency also greatly magnifies the difficulty of detecting evidence of use in the bloodstream or urine. Extremely sensitive laboratory techniques are required to detect such drugs—techniques capable of detecting

concentrations of a few parts per billion. The drugs are astronomically more profitable than heroin. This explains why the supply of these designer drugs can be expected to expand. An investment of \$2,000 translates into a street value of over \$1 billion.”

The DEA does acknowledge that some of the flow of synthetic drugs onto the black market comes directly from large pharmaceutical houses that are wittingly involved in the illegal trade. President Clinton has taken up this problem, in at least one, most egregious case. On Oct. 21, 1995, he signed Executive Order 12978, entitled “Blocking Assets and Prohibiting Transactions With Significant Narcotics Traffickers,” which named a dozen Colombian pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors as fronts for the Cali Cartel, and banned any American companies or citizens from doing business with them.

The DEA acknowledges that large “legitimate” pharmaceutical manufacturers in western Europe, China, and Brazil are now supplying drug cartels with synthetic drugs in growing volumes. Here, the evidence shows, again, that Dope, Inc. is a top-down structure.

### A unique challenge

For years, official U.S. government statistics on the use of illegal synthetic drugs have grossly underestimated the size of the traffic. There are understandable reasons for these errors.

Unlike cocaine, heroin, and marijuana, which are all cultivated drugs, synthetic

drugs are far more difficult to track. Through Landsat satellite photo-analysis, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance, and ground surveillance, drug-enforcement agencies can develop reliable estimates of the gross amount of opium poppy, coca plants, and marijuana plants under cultivation at any given time. Synthetic drugs, especially the newer designer drugs, cannot be tracked as easily, because they are manufactured from chemicals that are, for the most part, easily obtainable on the commercial market. This is precisely why many law enforcement specialists agree with Douglass and Livingstone, when they assert that designer drugs are “the wave of the future.”

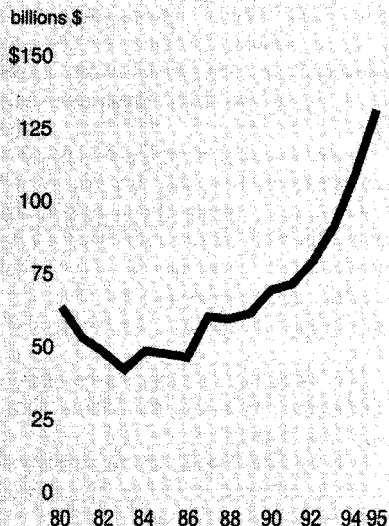
The DEA has developed a number of techniques for measuring the volume of synthetic drug abuse:

- They keep track of the number of underground synthetic drug laboratories, which are busted each year;
- Through the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) system, they receive data from every hospital emergency room in the United States, indicating the number of patients who come in with traces of synthetic drugs in their bloodstream, and the number of patients who die of synthetic drug overdoses;
- The Justice Department and the FBI try to maintain parallel data on all people who are arrested and tested for drugs;
- The DEA also keeps track of the volume of synthetic drugs seized each year;
- The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) questions a sample



Frenzied youth in Germany, many high on the drug Ecstasy, dance to computer-generated “techno” music, the latest aberration of the rock-drug counterculture.

**FIGURE 19**  
**Synthetic drugs: value of sales**



Sources: NNICC; DEA; Abt Associates; EIR.

of Americans about their use of illegal drugs;

- And, through undercover operations, the DEA, in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies, maintains generally up-to-date and reliable data on the wholesale and retail prices of every illegal drug, including all the major synthetics.

In the spring of 1995, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy published a report, "What America's Users Spend on Illegal Drugs, 1988-1993." The study was prepared by Abt Associates, Inc., a Cambridge, Massachusetts research outfit that has done illicit-drug research for the federal government for years. The Abt study developed data on heroin, cocaine, and marijuana abuse, using two distinctly different methods of analysis. They generated figures based on production data, and figures based on consumption data. The consumption data invariably relied on the highly dubious Household Survey. (Abt, to its credit, admitted this problem in the report: "We do note . . . that the NHSDA undoubtedly misses some users, and those who are reached probably have an incentive to misrepresent their consumption.")

In the case of cocaine, Abt's production-based data were in the same general ballpark as the EIR survey. (The consumption-based estimates were significantly lower than EIR's, across the board.) But in the case of synthetic drugs, where Abt was unable to

obtain any reliable production data, and, therefore, relied exclusively on the NHSDA-derived consumption statistics, the figures were grossly underestimated. Thus, for example, in 1993, Abt estimated that the total dollar value of all "Other Drugs" (i.e., not cocaine, heroin, or marijuana) in the United States that year was \$1.8 billion. The EIR estimate for 1993 was \$46 billion!

Even though the National Household Survey is notorious for understating the drug abuse problem, it does present a stark "best case" picture when it comes to the estimates of the number of Americans who are hooked on synthetic drugs. According to NHSDA figures for 1988-93, in each of those years, well over 2 million Americans used inhalants (usually, black market pharmaceuticals), 2.5 million used hallucinogens, and over 3 million used stimulants and tranquilizers.

### Our method

EIR researchers reviewed virtually every available DEA and NNICC study from 1977 to 1995, to develop a more reliable approximation of the synthetic drug trade. During 1977-80, the NNICC studies provided precise dollar estimates for domestic synthetics. From 1981-84, the NNICC studies published annual data on the number of doses ("d.u.") of synthetic drugs consumed by Americans. By multiplying the number of d.u.'s by \$5 (the average retail cost per dose of synthetic drugs, according to the DEA), EIR was able to come up with an estimated dollar value for illegal synthetic drugs, for the 1981-84 period.

The 1987 NNICC study reported that synthetic drug abuse that year was equal to the 1980 figures, and had increased by 30% from 1986. This made it possible to estimate the figures from 1985-87.

From 1987-90, the DEA released figures on the total number of doses of synthetic drugs seized in the United States. By reviewing the percentages of cocaine, marijuana, and heroin seized during the same period, EIR was able to estimate that the volume of synthetic drugs seized was approximately 20% of the total illicit trade. Thus, estimates on the size of the synthetic drug trade for the period from 1987-90 were generated.

For many of those years, and for 1990-95, the DEA also published data on the number of kilograms of synthetic drugs seized, the number of laboratories busted, and the number of emergency room cases reported in the DAWN survey. Specific data on the amount of methamphetamine seized

along the U.S.-Mexico border during the 1990s were also available, courtesy of the *National Methamphetamine Strategy*.

Based on these statistics, EIR developed an index which suggested a pattern of growth in the illegal synthetic drug trade. The figures for 1991-95 were derived, via that indexing method, from the more precise annual figures covering the period from 1977 to 1990. While there is an element of scientific guesswork in the post-1990 data, and, therefore, a possibility of greater margin of error, there is no doubt that the years 1992-95, as described by the DEA and other law enforcement sources, have been a period of geometric expansion of the illegal synthetic drug trade in the United States and in western and eastern Europe. The numbers generated by the EIR method are commensurate with the rates of growth described qualitatively in such locations as the DEA's April 1996 *National Methamphetamine Strategy* and the *National Drug Control Strategy: 1996*.

The tremendous growth in the synthetic drug market in the United States has, according to DEA and other law enforcement sources, been paralleled in both western and eastern Europe (including Russia). The DEA reports that the distribution of synthetic drugs is usually concentrated in the areas where there are laboratories producing the illegal products. Europe is widely identified as an area where there are concentrations of underground synthetic drug labs, including in such Central European states as the Czech Republic and Poland. The tremendous growth of Ecstasy use all across Europe further bears out this assessment.

For the purposes of this study, given the prevalence of illegal synthetic drugs on the European markets, EIR estimates that the U.S. totals represent half the world consumption of illegal synthetic drugs.

The meteoric rise in synthetic drug sales since 1990 (see **Figure 19**, which shows a jump from \$70 billion in global sales in 1990, to \$132 billion in 1995) correlates with another critical finding of this EIR study. In recent years, larger and larger percentages of the total opium crop are being produced for local consumption in the country of production, rather than for the American and European markets. This is greatly expanding the overall addict population worldwide. And, increasingly, synthetic drugs are supplementing, and, in some cases, replacing cocaine, heroin, and marijuana as the "drugs of choice" for so-called advanced sector users.