

## Novel (New) Psychoactive Substance (NPS) or 'legal highs'

Overall drug use has reduced in the UK. However, a significant recent development has been the increasing range of new and easily available novel psychoactive substances (NPS), also known as “legal highs”<sup>1</sup>. These drugs have been designed to evade drug laws, are widely available and have the potential to pose serious risks to public health and safety and can even be fatal. The emergence of NPS and the pace at which they have developed is a concern to policymakers, law enforcement personnel and healthcare professionals locally, nationally and across Europe and beyond<sup>2</sup>.

NPS are drugs which mimic, or are claimed to mimic, the effects of illegal drugs. These chemical substances are newly created, and hence, are not automatically controlled under legislation.

NPS have been defined as:

*“Psychoactive drugs, newly available in the UK, which are not prohibited by the United Nations Drug Conventions but which may pose a public health threat comparable to that posed by substances listed in these conventions”<sup>3</sup>.*

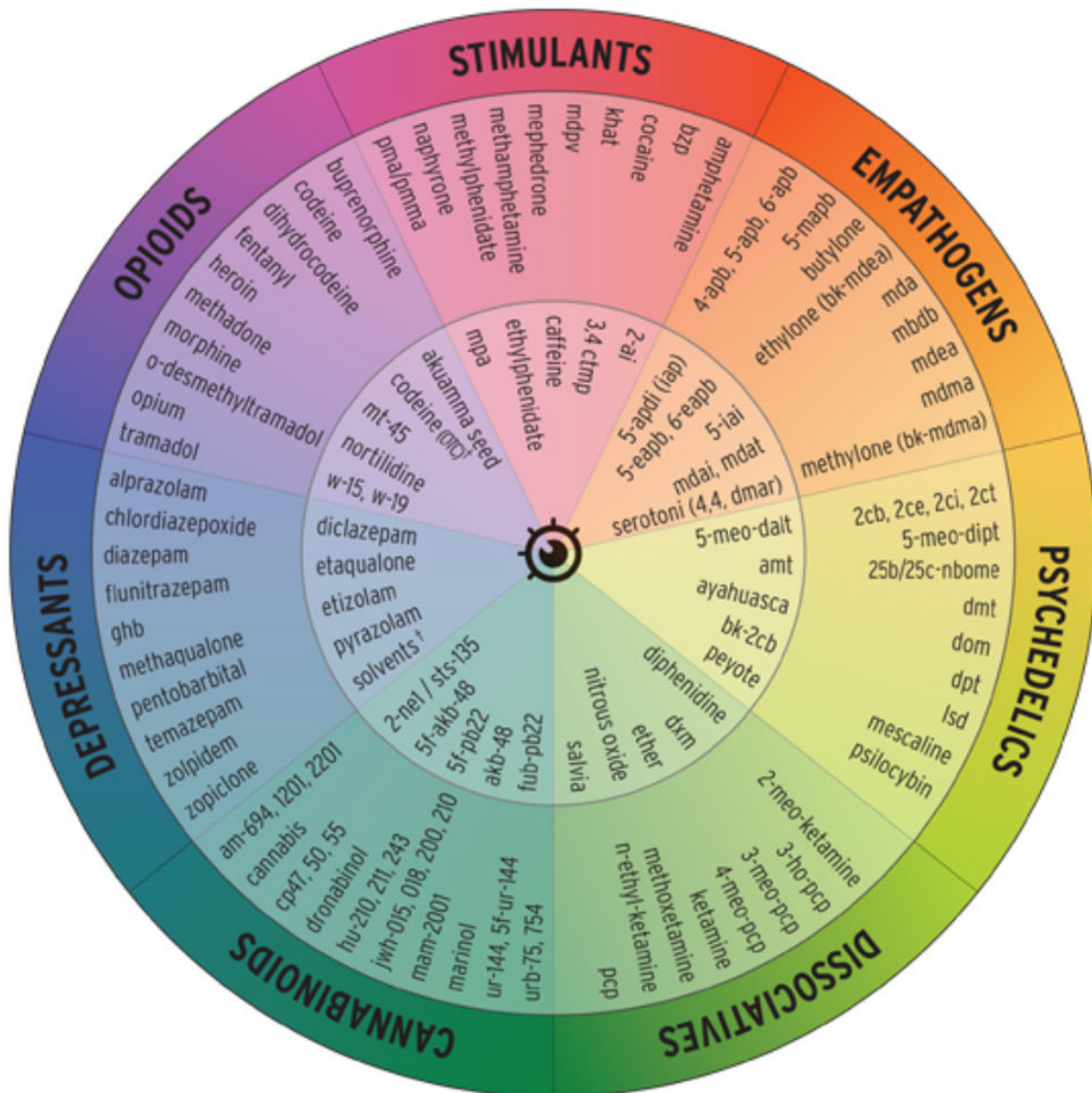
NPS can be grouped by their chemical names, or more usefully their intended effect on the user e.g. stimulants. Drug watch have produced “The Drug Wheel” which groups drugs under: stimulants, empathogens, psychedelics, dissociatives, depressants and opioids. This also helpfully shows which of these drugs are currently controlled in the UK and which are still legal.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “legal highs” is unhelpful for two reasons. Firstly, there appears to an assumption, particularly among young people, that legal means the substance has in some way been ‘approved’. Secondly, a drug mixture in a packet could contain a blend of legal and illegal compounds. We will therefore use the term novel psychoactive substances (NPS) within this board paper.

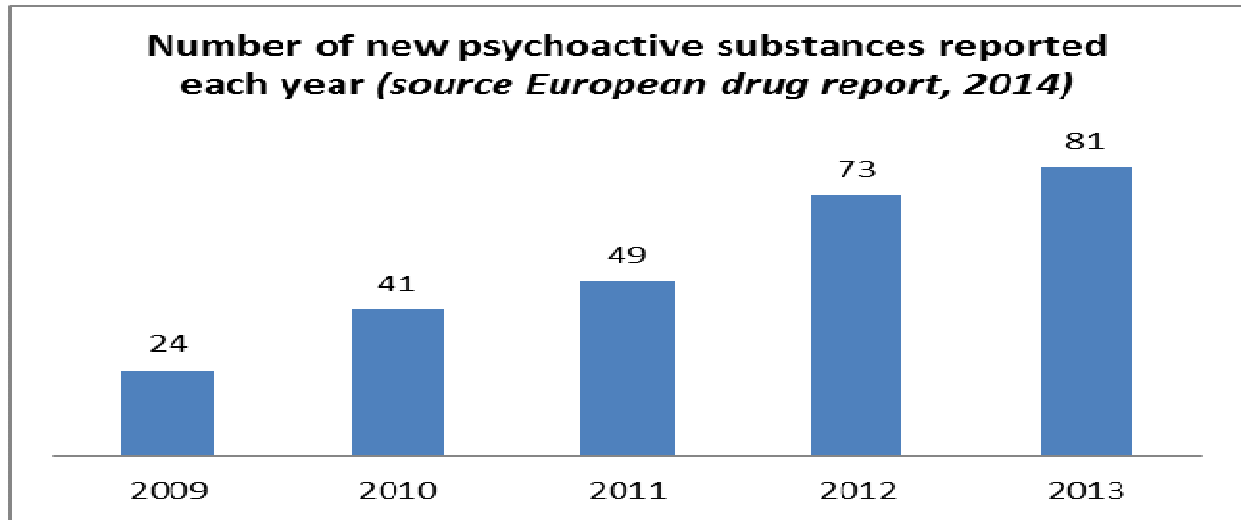
<sup>2</sup> Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Consideration of the Novel Psychoactive Substances (‘Legal Highs’), 2011:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/119139/acmdnps2011.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/119139/acmdnps2011.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Novel Psychoactive Substances Review Report of the Expert Panel, 2014:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/368583/NPSexpertReviewPanelReport.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/368583/NPSexpertReviewPanelReport.pdf)



The number of NPS available is constantly changing and growing. A record number of 81 substances were identified for the first time in Europe in 2013, an increase on previous years. This means the

number of identified NPS now exceeds the total number of psychoactive substances currently controlled by the international drug conventions<sup>4</sup>. Whilst generally there has been an increase in the number of novel NPS detected, it is important to note that the vast majority are permutations of groups of similar substances and many have not yet been identified in the UK.



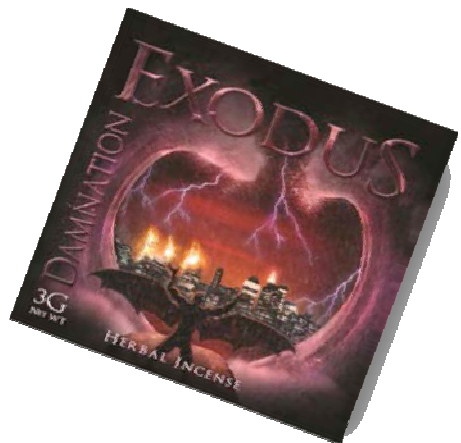
Example of some available Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) or 'legal highs'



The pictures below are a Cannabis pipe which is designed to look like an Asthma Inhaler. Found in the Suffolk Area

<sup>4</sup> European Drug Report, 2014:

[http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att\\_228272\\_EN\\_TDAT14001ENN.pdf](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/attachements.cfm/att_228272_EN_TDAT14001ENN.pdf)



Example of a “legal highs” website - Skunk works (<http://www.ukskunkworks.co.uk/index.cfm>)

The screenshot shows the website for 'uk skunkworks', described as 'one stop shop for lifestyle accessories'. The page features a navigation menu with links for Home, About Us, Feedback, Contact Us, Help, Blog, Links, Franchise, and Login / Register. A search bar is also present. A 'SPECIAL OFFERS' banner advertises a 20% discount on 'Dats All Folks' t-shirts. The main content area is titled 'Research Chemicals' and includes a disclaimer: 'ALL PRODUCTS ARE NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION. IT IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED TO USE OUR PRODUCTS FOR ANY FORM OF IN-VIVO RESEARCH OR EXPERIMENTATION.' Below this, it states: 'For use as gc/ms reference sample & for scientific research purposes only. IF YOUR LAB IS NOT EQUIPPED WITH AN ANALYTICAL BALANCE CAPABLE OF WEIGHING ACCURATELY DOWN AS LOW AS 10MG WITH AN ACCURACY OF +5 MG (THIS IS THE MINIMUM SPEC) THEN PLEASE DON'T ORDER THIS PRODUCT BECAUSE YOU ARE CLEARLY NOT PREPARED FOR ANY BONAFIDE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH. As with all products we do offer free shipping worldwide but please check legality in your own country before ordering as we cannot be held responsible for the actions of your customs. All products sold are strictly not for human consumption or any form of in-vivo research.' An 'Order by:' dropdown menu is set to 'Product Name - Ascending'. The products are displayed in a grid:

Product Name	Price	Average customer rating	Qty	Action
Blast	£10.00	☆☆☆☆☆	1	ADD TO CART
Diclozepam	£8.50	☆☆☆☆☆	1	ADD TO CART
Jack & Jills	£9.99	☆☆☆☆☆	1	ADD TO CART
Lady B's	£9.99	☆☆☆☆☆	1	ADD TO CART
Pink Panthers	£7.50	☆☆☆☆☆		
Rainbow Pellets	£9.99	☆☆☆☆☆		
Sparkl-E	£8.50	☆☆☆☆☆		

## Legislation

In the UK, the government has control of substances under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. If a drug is causing sufficient concern, the UK Government (following consultation with the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD)) can issue a Temporary Class Drugs Order for up to 12 months. This bans the import and supply of a substance but does not make possession a criminal offence. The ACMD then has 12 months to investigate and recommend classification if they consider there is sufficient evidence.

The manufacture of NPS is complex as the Government exercises its powers to ban a substance; the manufacturer will change a single ingredient which then circumnavigates the ban. See embedded document for examples of newer unregulated drugs.



Newer\_Unregulated\_Drugs\_List\_8.14.pdf

The Local Government Organisation (LGA) is campaigning for the UK to follow legislation introduced in Ireland four years ago. This bans the sale of all 'psychoactive' (brain altering) drugs and then exempts some, such as alcohol and tobacco. Currently, the system here works the other way round. The Irish legislation has effectively eliminated all 'head shops' that sell legal highs<sup>5</sup>.

#### Example 1:

In January 2013 West Yorkshire police conducted surveillance on a market stall within Kirkgate market and saw purchases of synthetic cannabinoids to a 16 year old boy. Both the seller and stall holder were arrested and charged with the offence under the Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985. The seller admitted the offence, however the stall owner denied the offence on the grounds that he had not actually sold the item to the boy. He was subsequently convicted on the basis that he bore legal responsibility for the actions of his staff. Both were given a conditional discharge.

#### Example 2:

Two Great Yarmouth traders pleaded guilty to contravening a Safety Notice at Great Yarmouth Magistrates Court on 21 May 2013. In these two cases the traders were visited by Trading Standards Officers investigating the sale of novel psychoactive substances. Both traders were advised that as the products might pose a risk to users they should be labelled with proper warnings and were issued with „requirements to mark“, making it clear that any similar products had to be labelled too. When the officers later revisited both premises and found that their instructions had not been followed, the products were seized. Both traders were fined, the seized products were forfeited and the court imposed a conditional discharge for 12 months.

## **CRI**

CRI have created [strangemolecules.org.uk](http://strangemolecules.org.uk), a website for young people. It aims to reduce the harm that results from young people taking legal highs by providing clear, non-patronizing information and offering an anonymous method of asking for expert advice.

CRI, NPS Website <http://www.cri.org.uk/new-psychoactive-substances>

CRI collect information about NPS, their popularity, availability and negative effects in their work with service users around the country. We use this information to shape our services and constantly improve the quality of care we offer to users of NPS.

CRI are hiring more NPS specialists in services, and delivering training to schools, youth workers, professionals and colleges.

Michael Lawrence, CRI's Novel Psychoactive Substance Development Lead, heads up all our work on NPS. He was on the NPS sub-group for education and prevention, established by Norman Baker MP, and he meets regularly with the Department of Health to share CRI's up-to-date expertise on NPS.

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<sup>5</sup>LGA press release 13 September 2014, Government urged by councils to outlaw all 'legal high' sales: [http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/6516886/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/6516886/NEWS)

CRI set up specialist NPS drop-in centers in areas where they are needed.

### **Young Addaction**

Provides Legal Highs training and Drugs awareness where we include legal highs awareness education. (see embedded power point)



Young Addaction also delivers skills sessions in house for the team.

With young people/Tier 3 clients Young Addaction complete awareness sessions around legal highs to educate as they may come into contact with them. The team are guided by their own knowledge and the presentation. They are also discussed when doing the first aid session to reinforce side effects that they can have. At the Bike project they used a Card game re legal highs that was well received. And sometimes newspaper cuttings used for local information to show it does happen. Reading labels are discussed to minimise risk.

Young Addaction also offer OCNW accredited level 3 course in RESPONDING TO SUBSTANCE MISUSE, to key partners.