

Report from DanceSafe Laboratory Analysis Program Reveals DXM Tablets Sold as "Ecstasy"

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THIS SUMMER was enormously successful for us. We now have local chapters in the San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, and Vancouver. Donations have been steady and have enabled us to provide our laboratory pill analysis service for free to US residents. We have distributed over 250 Ecstasy Testing Kits to users across the country, and have successfully implemented an on-site pill testing program in the Oakland rave scene. The onsite testing program has contributed to a measurable decrease in the number of fake and adulterated ecstasy tablets, as well as the number of medical emergencies, in the Bay Area. Below is a summary of our programs and accomplishments.

Laboratory Analysis Program

Last Spring we launched a laboratory pill analysis program whereby US residents can anonymously send street ecstasy

tablets to a professional lab for qualitative analysis using full-scale gas chromatography. The results are posted regularly to our website (www.harmreduction.net/dancesafe).

Since July the laboratory has received twenty-eight pills from cities around the US including San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Nashville, Seattle, Orlando, San Antonio, Oakland, St. Petersburg (FL) and Birmingham.

Of these twenty-eight pills, fifteen contained entactogenic compounds. Eleven of them were pure MDMA, while one contained MDMA and caffeine, one contained MDE only, one contained MDA only, and one contained a combination of MDMA and MDE. Of the remaining thirteen, three contained no drugs at all, one contained only caffeine, one contained a combination of

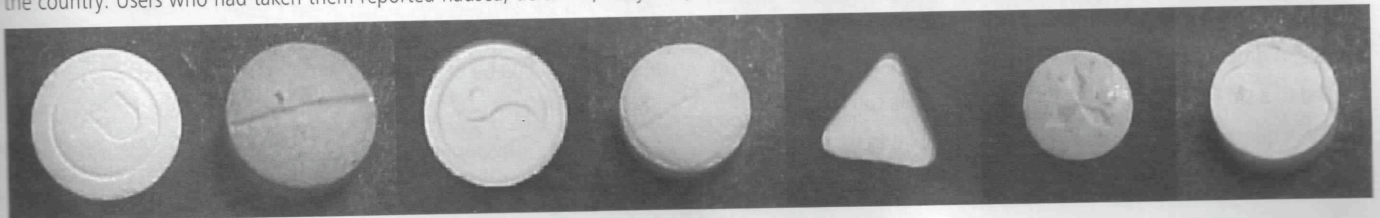
Guaifenesin and Ephedrine, and the remaining eight contained only Dextromethorphan (DXM).

The prevalence of DXM tablets on the ecstasy market is of particular concern. DXM is a cough suppressant that in high doses is a dissociative similar to ketamine. We had been receiving numerous emails from ecstasy users reporting extremely unpleasant experiences from supposed ecstasy tablets, particularly a brand known as "green triangles" which had surfaced everywhere around the country. Users who had taken these pills reported nausea, delirium, itchy skin, loss of motor control, and audio and visual hallucinations. Effects were reported by some to have lasted 36 hours or longer, particularly in users who had taken multiple pills. Some users reported that they or their friends had been hospitalized after taking these pills, and the

Dancesafe volunteers personally witnessed over a dozen medical emergencies requiring hospitalization in Oakland where users had consumed the green triangles.

The rumor going around was that these pills contained heroin and/or mescaline. After testing five of these pills at the laboratory we discovered that they contained high doses of DXM (averaging 127mg per pill). We immediately posted warnings on our website and through various rave email lists. While relatively safe in the proper dosage and environment, an overdose of DXM in a rave setting, particularly by someone not expecting the drug, can be dangerous. Furthermore, DXM is contraindicated with MDMA. It is both a serotonin releaser and a reuptake inhibitor, as well as being metabolized by the same liver enzyme as MDMA, thus preventing the proper

The "yin yang" pill below contained MDE only. The "mitsubishi" contained caffeine only. The "wildflower" (far right) contained MDA only. All other pills pictured below contained DXM only. A brand known as "green triangles" which contained DXM only surfaced everywhere around the country. Users who had taken them reported nausea, delirium, itchy skin, loss of motor control, and audio and visual hallucinations.



breakdown of MDMA. Further-
 more, DXM inhibits perspiration,
 elevating body temperature.
 Combining DXM and MDMA,
 therefore, significantly increases
 ones chance of "serotonin
 syndrome," a rare but potentially
 fatal condition. We witnessed a
 number of serotonin syndrome
 occurrences involving accidental
 DXM/MDMA combinations, and
 there are a number of docu-
 mented cases of serotonin
 syndrome resulting from people
 who had taken DXM-containing
 cough syrup while on MAOIs or
 SSRIs, two types of serotonin-
 affecting anti-depressants.
 DXM is cheap and legal,
 which is probably one of the
 reasons it has become such a
 common adulterant on the
 lucrative ecstasy market. It is our
 hope that as information about
 the dangers of DXM-laced
 'ecstasy' tablets becomes known,
 its prevalence on the ecstasy
 market will decrease.

Ecstasy Testing Kits

An ecstasy testing kit
 consists of a chemical called
 "Marquis Reagent," which can
 be used to identify the presence
 of amphetamine-like com-
 pounds. A drop of the reagent is
 applied to a small scraping of
 the pill in question and the color
 change is observed. If an
 ecstasy tablet to us and we will
 test it for them using the
 reagent will turn black or dark
 purple very quickly. If the pill
 contains only speed (amphet-
 amine, methamphetamine, or
 ephedrine) the reagent will turn
 orange. 2CB causes the a
 yellow/green reaction, and DXM
 will cause the reagent to emit
 smoke and then slowly turn
 black after a distinctive initial
 delay of five to seven seconds.
 Since launching our testing
 kit distribution program in July,
 we have distributed almost 178
 kits to users in 27 States and
 Canada, and almost 100 more
 to Bay Area users. Each kit
 contains enough reagent to test
 about 150 pills. Users have
 reported success in screening
 against fake pills, including the
 many brands of DXM-laced pills
 on the market.

On-site Testing

Perhaps the most success-
 ful harm reduction program we
 have undertaken is an on-site
 testing program within the
 massive Oakland rave commu-
 nity. Almost every weekend
 enormous rave parties take place
 in Oakland, with anywhere
 between 4,000 and 12,000
 people attending. We staff harm
 reduction booths at these events
 where, along with answering
 questions and distributing
 literature on the safer use of
 ecstasy and other dance drugs,
 we provide an on-site pill testing
 service. Users can bring their
 ecstasy tablet to us and we will
 test it for them using the

Marquis reagent kit (we only
 need to scrape a tiny bit off the
 pill). We keep records of all the
 pills we test, and over the last
 four months have begun to
 notice a decrease in the number
 of fake pills being sold.
 Most of the fake pills users
 bring to us at these raves were
 sold to them by scam dealers
 inside the rave. After we tell
 them that there is no ecstasy-like
 substance in the pill (and/or
 whether it contains or DXM)
 they will usually run off to find
 the person who sold the pill to
 them and try to get their money
 back. Oftentimes they do, after
 which they return to our table
 and thank us. At one particular
 rave on September 18, we
 tested 40 fake pills, 26 of them
 DXM-laced green triangles. We
 helped all of these people avoid
 ingesting the fake pills, and
 many of them were even able to
 get their money back. One of the
 scam dealers was ejected from
 the rave by a group of angry
 users. In another By placing
 direct pressure on the scam
 dealers in this way, our on-site
 testing program has contributed
 to a noticeable reduction in the
 number of fake pills being sold
 in the Oakland rave scene.

Funding

July was a turning point in
 our funding situation when we
 received a \$10,000 donation
 from Paul Phillips, San Francisco
 resident and director of the
 popular internet site
 "go2net.com." This money
 helped us jump-start our

laboratory testing program (the
 lab charges \$110 for each pill
 analysis) and also provided us
 with start-up funds to begin our
 testing-kit distribution program,
 which has become a steady
 source of funding in itself.
 Special mention must be given
 to MAPS as well, who is our
 non-profit sponsor and who
 donates to us the use of their
 secure internet server. •

**DanceSafe: Promoting Health
 and Safety Within the Rave and
 Nightclub Community**
 www.harmreduction.net/
 dancesafe