

User likens Ecstasy to LSD, speed

By SUE MORRISON
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The lure of the drug Ecstasy, one user says, is that "it lets my body go on a trip without taking my mind along."

He described the effect of ingesting Ecstasy as a cross between using LSD — a hallucinogen that heightens the senses — and speed, either methamphetamine or amphetamine.

"It makes your body all rubbery and allows you to do all sorts of different things and focus on details, like acid (LSD) does, but you don't hallucinate. Your mind stays in control," said the user, who discussed the drug on the condition that he not be identified.

Ecstasy most often is swallowed in tablet form. Sometimes, users crush it and sniff or intravenously inject the powder.

The so-called "designer" drug, a chemical derivative of the regulated drug methylenedioxyamphetamine, will be legal until July 1 when a federal ban takes effect.

The dangers of using Ecstasy are not documented, because the drug is relatively new. However, nerve damage is suspected because of the similarity in chemical structure to the parent drug MDA, which destroys nerve terminals in the brain, affecting motor functions and thought processes.

"It has methamphetamine in it, which is addictive in itself," said Tony Montoya of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in Dallas. "I would venture to say it's psychologically addictive to people who tend toward the addiction of drugs."

Because it is a mood enhancer, Montoya said, people under the influence of Ecstasy who have suicidal or homicidal feelings might kill themselves or someone else.

When the Drug Enforcement Administration announced May 31 that possession of Ecstasy would be banned, protests were issued by psychiatrists and psychologists who said their clients who used the drug in therapy had undergone remarkable progress.

"That's the same sort of thing you heard about LSD and even Valium when they first came out," Montoya said. "These people think they can control the use of the drug in a patient by reading the person's mood and that's just not always accurate."

"There's always a potential for harm and addiction any time you tell someone (a drug) is going to go to the root of their problems. The tendency to say, 'I'm going to take it, and my problems are going to go away. My doctor's helping me.'"

One user, who also sells the drug, said fears about the effects of Ecstasy are inflated.

"I don't think it's hurt anybody," he said. "When are these people going to realize that with ... all the freedoms the Constitution guarantees, it needs to guarantee the right to private pleasure as you see fit?"

"Sure, there's a few people who have done some bizarre things while using it, but those are the guys who take four or five hits at once. They're the same ones who walk into a bar and drink 12 shots of tequila in a row."

at Lemon Avenue and the Dallas North Tollway, spoke from his office Friday on the condition that he not be identified. He said that when his stores began selling the drug May 3, his venture had a \$40,000 to \$50,000 debt.

"We're now operating in the black, and that's strictly from Ecstasy," he said. "In May, we averaged about 1,000 sales a week at \$20 a hit. I can't give you the figures for June, because I don't have my sales tax receipts back from the state (comptroller's office). It has diminished, though, with more people selling it."

"When we were first approached by the guy dealing with the lab (in California), we were told it was made with sassafras, nutmeg and so on. I can't tell you who makes it, because I don't know; they're very careful ... and the salesman is very tight-lipped. They did tell us that if we didn't retail it for \$20, they would not sell to us again; they wanted total price control.

"All I know is that — depending on the wholesale price, which can be from \$6 to \$10 per unit, and we buy in 1,000-unit packages — we have up to a 100-percent profit."

With business booming, a cleared debt and no legal ramifications, the shop operator said he has no qualms about selling Ecstasy.

"We really had no idea it was going to take off like it did, and it wasn't until later that we heard what it really was," he said. "By that time, sales were phenomenal. We

sell the best stuff — there's five or six types, and they tend to make people sick to their stomachs — and people know it.

"You'd be surprised how many straight people are coming here just to buy it. A lot of them want it because they've never used drugs simply because it's against the law, and here's their chance to experiment with no chance of repercussions, and they know this is the place to get it. And I have several multiples, (people) who buy large quantities to sell in places like Arlington, marking the price up about \$5.

"Until it's illegal, it's nothing to me to sell it. I am not a drug dealer; I'm just running a business."

Regarding surplus inventory, the shop operator said he is not buying any more of the drug than he thinks he'll sell and has specific plans for ceasing the venture.

"I'm not even going to mess with June 30 (Sunday)," he said. "On June 29, I'm closing 30 minutes early and clearing all the shops. ... Let's just put it this way: I know of some people who will probably be willing to take it off my hands. If not, I'll call the police and ask them to come get it off my hands.

"Look, I run a legitimate business. I'm not looking for any trouble; it wouldn't be worth it and would only hurt me."

After Sunday? Police and users agree that Ecstasy will still be available, though not overtly.

"We'll be able to enforce (the new

law) as of July," said Phil Jordan of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration office in Dallas. "If I found somebody now with it, I would not arrest them. We're just monitoring situations and have made undercover purchases, so we know where it's being sold. Call July 2, and I'll have some arrest reports for you."

But the game goes on. Some people familiar with the trade say drug dealers already have developed an alternative by distributing another chemical derivative of MDA that — like Ecstasy when it arrived — isn't covered by the law books yet.

"Wouldn't you, seeing this kind of business, pay a very intelligent chemist to go back to the drawing board?" asked the leather shop operator.

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