

Energy Control: Harm Reduction with Drug Analysis at Boom Festival



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ENERGY CONTROL was born in Barcelona in 1997 as a pioneer project in the field of risk reduction among drug users in Spain. Since then, this group has earned the appreciation and respect from European, national, regional and local administrations, as well as the support and collaboration from the entertainment sector related to the nightlife scene. Our Organization is proud to be successfully achieving most of our goals with our target population.

Energy Control consists of 120 volunteers who work within a preventive action model, offering objective, real and useful knowledge about drugs, in a friendly frame and between peers in order to improve the effectiveness of that information.

One of the main services provided by Energy Control to the drug user community is the Substance Analysis Service, available to the whole country by postal mail, and also performed on demand at festivals and free parties, as a means to support risk reduction behaviors, oriented to control the possibility of drug adulteration and drug overdoses in the use of drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine, speed or ketamine.

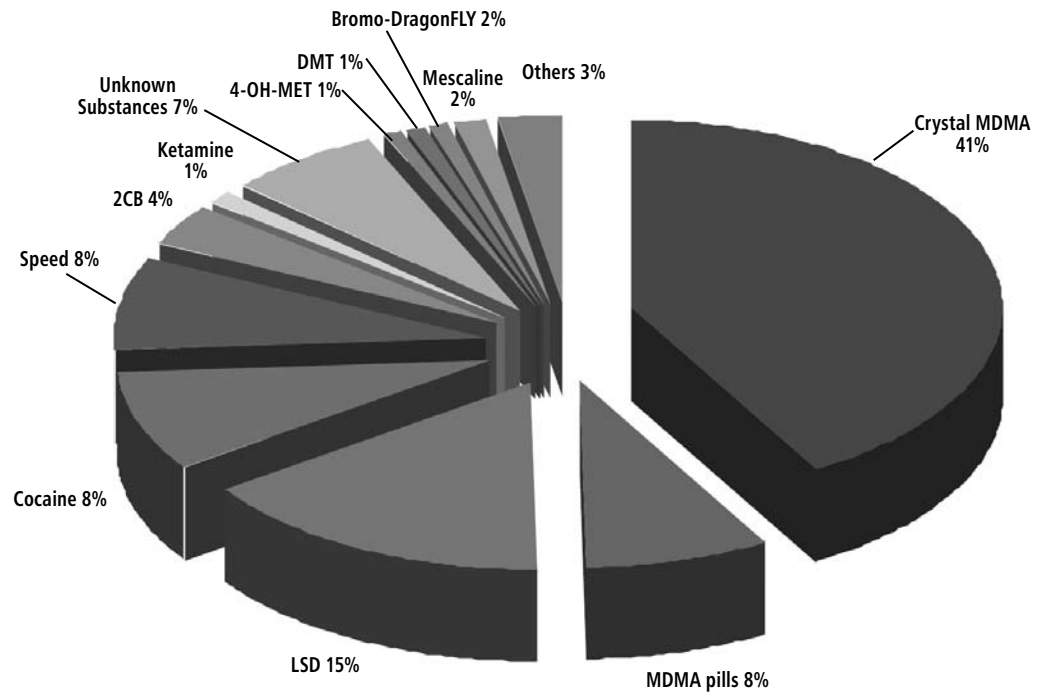
Our efforts to perform substance analysis for the safety of drug-users are non-regulated by the Spanish government. In 11 years we've never had any problems with the analysis we perform on demand at parties and festivals, nor with those performed in our head office in Barcelona. Portugal seems to be similarly passive about our efforts and did not interfere with us at the Boom Festival celebrated there. At Boom we decided to implement a more complex analysis service than the usual one we offered in that context—mainly the colorimetric tests made with Marquis Reagent and similar ones. We've been working for the last three years with a Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) system to perform more specific analysis. TLC is a technique used to separate pure components of a sample allowing us to detect and identify any adulterant present in it. This kind of analysis increases our interaction with the users, as we're able to give them accurate and detailed information about

the substance that he or she is planning to use, including any adulterants.

From August 11th through August 16th, our team analyzed 303 samples with TLC at the Boom Festival. The spectrum of substances analyzed was large. The pie chart (*figure 1*) shows the variety of substances that we analyzed:

Half of the samples were MDMA, and most of those were bought as "crystal" and the rest were tablets. (The use of the term crystal here is applied to the pure salt form of MDMA, like the way cocaine HCl is sold. This is contrary to the American term "crystal," which chiefly refers to methamphetamine.) The second substance most analyzed was LSD. This was unusual for us, as LSD is sparsely analyzed by us at other festivals. The remarkable variety of other psychedelic substances has been surprising. It's important to make clear that the great majority of these other psychedelic substances were those that users thought to buy and that they were adulterant-free.

Figure 1: **Types of substances in the analysis system**

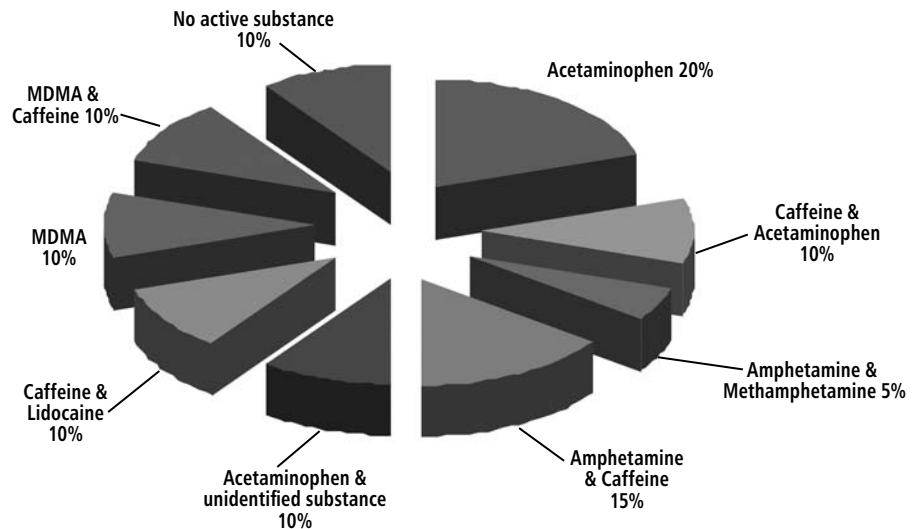


Substances named as “others” (3%), appeared one single time in the analysis performed. They were: AMT, Changa, 4-ACO-DMT, DOC, DPT, methylone and opium.

Seven percent (7%) of the substances received were unknown by the person who brought the substance to our facility. The main reason for this was that most of these drugs had been found on the floor. The next pie chart (figure 2) shows the results obtained with TLC of these unknown substances:

A critical aspect of our on demand analysis service is offering the users the possibility to identify in a very short time the composition of the substances they are going to have and the chance to dismiss those with unknown or dangerous content. In the cases we weren't able to identify the composition of a sample in that time, we offered the possibility to users to provide us with an additional sample to test in a laboratory where more complete analyses are performed. In these cases, the result is communicated to the users by e-mail.

Figure 2: **Unknown substances**



With TLC technique we were able to identify the majority of adulterants present in the samples we received. The kind of adulterants and their frequency in the samples analyzed with TLC varied depending on the alleged substance that was brought for analysis (MDMA, cocaine, speed, etc.).

In the case of MDMA, the most common adulterant was caffeine. Even though the “crystal” presentation of MDMA facilitates its adulteration, our analysis found that this adulteration was more often detected in pills and tablets. This fact sets the same trend that we’ve been observing in Spain in the last years.

The most frequent adulterant found in pills was m-CPP, a legal substance with applications limited to the fields of neurological and psychiatric research. Although it has been occasionally used in human beings, the risks of its recreational use, including high or repeated doses and/or in combination with other drugs (including alcohol), are still unknown. We also found some 2C-B pills sold as MDMA.

It’s very important to identify substances like m-CPP or 2C-B sold as MDMA, since their effects are very different from those expected for MDMA use. In Spain, several medical urgencies related with this form of adulteration have occurred recently. In some of these emergencies, users thought that the content of MDMA was scarce and for this reason they overdosed themselves.

The LSD we analyzed was free of adulteration. We analyzed LSD in forms of blotter, liquid, and microdots. We also found that LSD that came as red small stars was being sold as mescaline. Only in one case did a sample received as mescaline actually contain real mescaline powder.

Cocaine was one of the substances that suffered the greatest adulteration. Only 12% of the cocaine samples we received were cocaine without adulterants. The most common adulterant was caffeine, becoming the only stimulating substance in 40% of the alleged samples of cocaine that we analyzed.

Speed (amphetamine and methamphetamine) was the most adulterated substance among all that we analyzed with TLC technique. This result mirrors the same tendency that we have been observing in Spain for the last several years, where less than 10% of the speed analyzed in our service is adulterant-free.

Finally, we at Energy Control are definitely glad to have performed our services within the Boom Festival this year. We are intrigued by the high variety of substances analyzed in comparison to other festivals where we also offer the TLC analysis service. It’s obvious that Boom’s atmosphere encourages lots of people to experiment with psychedelics like LSD, or with many other new substances. It is absolutely necessary to offer an efficient drug testing service that can determine which substances are consumed. Being able to do almost instant analysis is important for real risk reduction within the festival.

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