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INFORMATION BULLETIN

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PCP Tablets Sold as MDMA

The purpose of this Information Bulletin is to inform the law enforcement and treatment communities about the nontraditional distribution of the hallucinogen PCP (phencyclidine). In one recent case, PCP was distributed as the club drug MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine) in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. In another, tablets containing PCP, ketamine, ephedrine, and caffeine were being sold as MDMA in Upstate New York.

Tablets composed entirely of the hallucinogen PCP (phencyclidine)—as revealed by laboratory analysis—but sold as MDMA (ecstasy) are being distributed in Northern Virginia. The Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) first encountered the tablets during an undercover drug operation in December 2000, and since that time the FCPD has seized approximately 500 tablets from three Washington D.C.-based distributors. The tablets, slightly smaller in diameter than a common aspirin tablet, are engraved with a Pokémon cartoon character known as "Pikachu." They are orange in color with orange specks, are flat with beveled edges, and have no protective glaze or coating. The FCPD has also seized white tablets imprinted with the Pikachu character, but those contained MDMA only. The tablets are being sold for $15 each.

In an earlier incident, the Monroe County Public Safety Laboratory in Rochester, New York, received a submission in August 2000 consisting of six tan tablets, each 7 mm in diameter with an average weight of 237 mg. They were found to contain PCP, ketamine, ephedrine, and caffeine. Three of the tablets were imprinted with a "K" logo. The other tablets were too eroded to distinguish any logo. This was the first encounter with this combination of drugs in tablet form at the Monroe County Public Safety Laboratory.

Although these could be isolated incidents, law enforcement and treatment providers should be mindful that PCP continues to be available primarily in liquid form in select metropolitan areas throughout the nation.

PCP's effects include sensory deprivation that deadens pain. PCP abusers often display unpredictable and violent behavior that may present high risks to law enforcement and others. The absorption of PCP via skin exposure to tablet dust also presents a potential hazard to law enforcement personnel. To date, medical emergency personnel in Fairfax County have not reported any recent cases of PCP-related admissions.

Photo courtesy of Fairfax County Police Department.

PCP, a synthetic drug, has been a Schedule II drug under the Controlled Substances Act since 1978. The chemicals required to manufacture PCP are readily available and inexpensive, and the production process is fairly simple. In its pure form, PCP is a white crystalline powder that is readily soluble in water or alcohol but can be pressed into tablets. Most PCP contains contaminants from its makeshift manufacture, resulting in a color ranging from tan to brown. Its consistency ranges from a crystalline powder to a gummy mass. PCP is commonly applied to a leafy material, such as parsley, mint, oregano, or marijuana, and smoked. According to the Drug Enforcement Administration, PCP has not commonly been distributed in tablet form since the late 1970s.