

# Keeping Ourselves Safe

“Legal Highs”

# This presentation will cover:

- What are “Legal Highs” or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)?
- Who uses them
- The impacts on health and community
- Where do people get them from?
- Effective controls
- The Devon response

# Legal? Highs?

- “Legal” does not mean safe

Many are now illegal.....and some may contain illegal substances

- “High” – they mimic all types of drugs including depressants, opiates, stimulants

Which is why the term New Psychoactive Substances or NPS is used

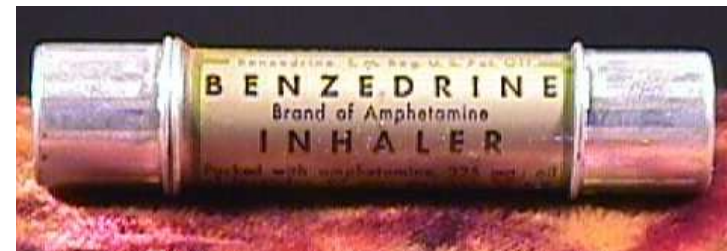
# What are NPS?

‘A narcotic or psychotropic substance newly available in the UK [and mostly but not exclusively synthetic] which may pose a public health threat comparable to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971’

UK Government

# New? Newly abused.....

- 1912 – MDMA first synthesised
- 1914 – Cocaine use in WW1
- 1929 – Mephedrone first synthesised then forgotten till 2003
- WW2 – Both sides used amphetamine and methamphetamine



# NPS/Legal Highs and Club Drugs

Blurred distinction between:

- “Old” Club drugs such as methamphetamine, ecstasy, GHB/GBL and mephedrone
- Used in clubs, bars and at concerts and parties

And

- “New Psychoactive Substances” – often used likewise



# Herbal Smoking Mixtures

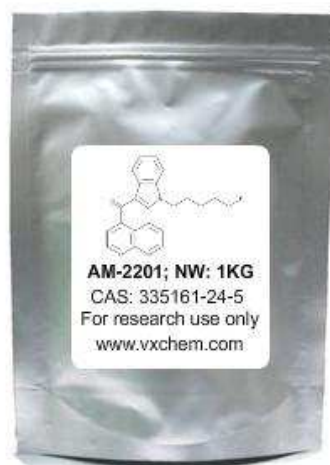
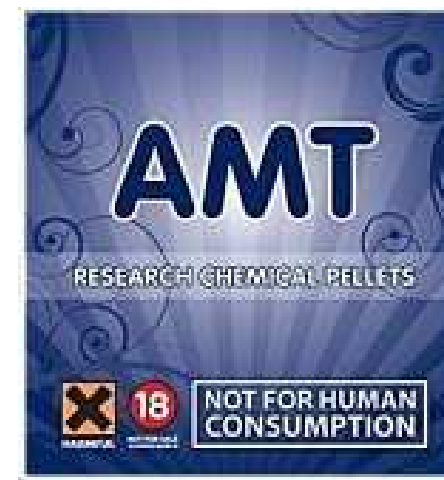
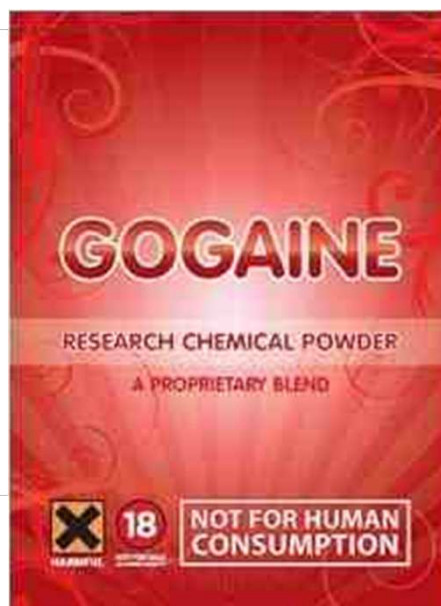
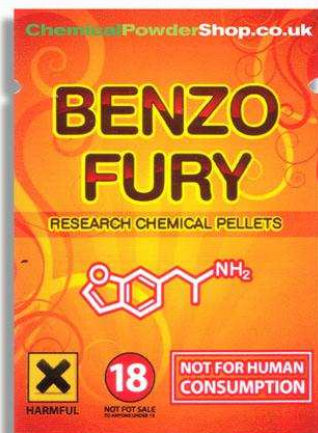


Template Version: 1.0 (January 2013)





# Powders, Pills and Potions





# Who uses NPS?

Very little solid data but lots of anecdote

Likely to be different cohorts:

- “Clubbers” and recreational users
- Poly Drug Users – using with illegal drugs
- Drug Users who can’t get hold of their “normal” drug of choice
- “Experimenters” including Young People

# Devon Youth Service Legal Highs and Energy Drinks Survey 2013

295 young people (13-19 year olds) across Exeter, East and Mid Devon

- 85% reported drinking energy drinks
  - 56% every day
    - 27% more than 3 a day
- 39% had tried illegal drugs mainly cannabis
- 9% (27) had used “legal highs” – mainly ‘smokeable’, eg Black Mamba
  - Most thought they were very harmful and that they are easy to obtain

# Health Impacts

- Poly substance use – mostly with alcohol
- Psychosis
  - Numbers are low but the impact is high
  - Often don't respond to symptomatic treatment
- Injecting
  - NPS mostly not injected, but increasing concern about the injection by some, usually known drug users
  - Frequency of use often higher than with opiates

# Impacts on communities

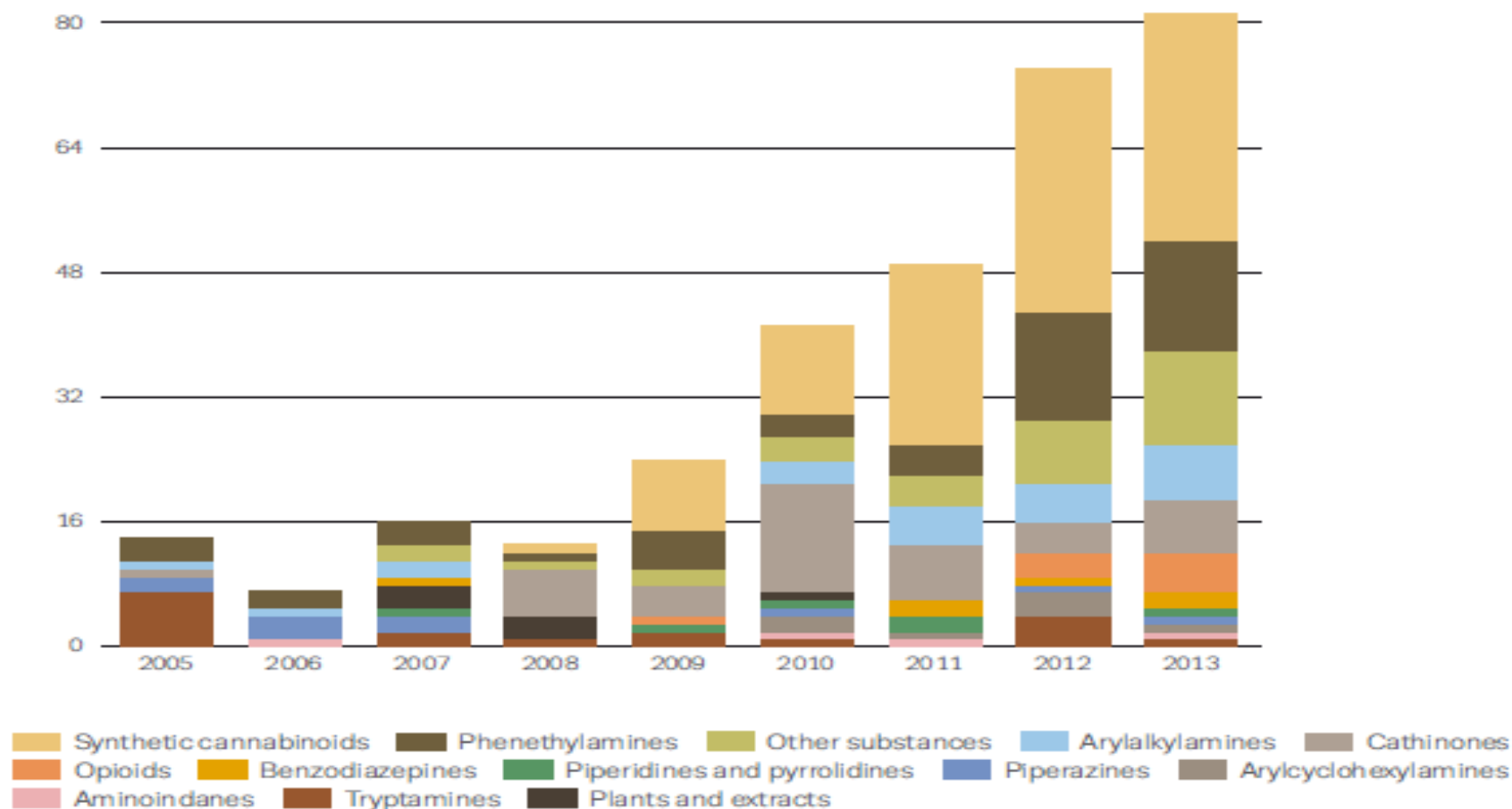
- Supported Housing agencies have raised concerns about use of NPS in their client groups
- Police – ASB in City Centres
- DPT & Psychiatric Liaison in RD&E Hospital

# Where do people buy them?

- **“Head Shops”**
- **The internet**
- **Friends or their “usual” network  
(Plymouth research)**

# New psychoactive substances notified for the first time to the Early Warning System since May 2005

## EMCDDA 2013



# What can be Done?

## **Tackling Supply**

- Close the “Head Shops”? Not as easy as it sounds
  - Cost of testing is prohibitive
  - Legislation doesn’t quite fit – ASB is closest & others being tried out elsewhere

## **Prevention**

- Banning the drugs? Does it work?

## **Treatment**

- RISE and Y-SMART both work with people who use NPS

The UK Government is now looking at this in much more detail



# The Devon Multi-Agency Response

Agencies involved:

- Police
- Trading Standards
- Housing and Homelessness support agencies
- DPT Psychiatric Liaison - A&Es
- Ripple Effect volunteers
- Prisons
- Turnaround (IOM)
- Probation
- Community Safety Partnerships
- Youth Offending Teams
- Education colleagues in the future.....

# What next?

- Continued multi-agency work – including colleges and schools
- Development of a strategy for a consistent approach across Devon
- Training of staff/volunteers in partner agencies...
- Continued collection and reporting of data and incidents
- Tackling supply
- Work with Ripple Effect volunteers and others to promote harm reduction advice
- Treatment services to continue to develop skills and interventions around NPS

# Keeping things in perspective

This is an increasing European and global trend which needs to be monitored

- Local drug services for Young People (YSMART) and adults (RISE) work with people who take NPSs – Help is available
- Drug use has been falling among 11 – 15 year olds in England and Wales since 2003

# Useful Websites/Information

- [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)
- [www.whynotfindout.org](http://www.whynotfindout.org) Angelus Foundation website for teenagers on Legal Highs
- [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) Home Office website with guidance
- [www.nta.nhs.uk](http://www.nta.nhs.uk) National Treatment Agency website

# And finally

My thanks go to:

Steve Dredge, Devon and Cornwall Police

Debra Lapthorne, Public Health England

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