

National Assembly for Wales

Health and Social Care Committee

Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”)

Evidence from UKChemicalResearch – LH 09



www.ukchemicalresearch.org

Mission Statement

ukchemicalresearch (UKCR) was created in response to the growing need for information relating to Research Chemicals. We aim to provide individuals with a forum to document and discuss their experiences and views on research chemicals as well as highlighting dosage, safety and harm reduction information gathered from individuals' own findings for those who have made the choice to experiment with these substances.

Providing information on a range of ever changing substances and chemicals could be seen as breaking taboos, however the nature of the human is to explore and learn and by providing the individual with as much information as we can we are allowing people to make informed choices for themselves with the intention of reducing harm. The information on the forum is provided by the members for the members and guests - everyone is welcome to contribute. We encourage chat and debate surrounding well established, analogue and novel chemicals. Our primary aim is to support a safer, better informed community where experienced and inexperienced individuals can ask questions and potentially experiment under safer circumstances

Our Goals

To provide open and honest information about research chemicals

To encourage debate around chemicals and vendors

To promote non-judgemental information sharing leading to increased safety for members and individuals using research chemicals/NPS

To provide the most current and up to date information regarding use of research chemicals and new and emerging legal substances

To recognise humanist values, the drug user's decision to use drugs is accepted as fact. No moral judgement is made either to condemn or to support use of drugs.

Promote a general understanding and awareness of Research Chemicals and new emerging legal drugs to a wider audience by providing accurate and up-to-date information

Remaining independent of any company, vendor or individual with an interest in promotion of research chemicals

The forum was established four years ago in order to provide an environment where people could find and ask for information without being made to feel ridiculed in any way. Whilst some of the larger and longer established forums such as drugs forum and blue light provide excellent information and reference often people feel intimidated by some of the members.

In order to provide the best possible harm reduction information we believe it is vital to include sourcing of products, this has the benefit of making sure that the members have access to reputable vendors selling high quality products which minimises harm. The forum is completely independent of any vendor or advertising, this allows us to remain completely impartial and allows us to provide honest and accurate information to the members and guests.

We do however have open channels of communication with many of the major vendors of NPS this has proved to be invaluable. When the substance 5-IT was initially marketed our members began reporting negative side effects and we contacted all of the major vendors and asked them to withdraw the substance from sale, this was done immediately without question.

We currently have 4562 registered members making an average of 119 posts per day. Our average daily visitors are 1500, 200 members and 1300 guests.

Whilst we are a forum for the discussion of UK legal NPS our analytics show we have visitors from all over the world.

Over the last six months are visitors are detailed in the table below

COUNTRY	VISITORS
United Kingdom	70,028
USA	35,248
Germany	5,006
France	4,931
Australia	2,941
Ireland	1,220
Canada	2,768
Netherlands	2,177
Sweden	2,243
Belgium	854

England	60,054
Scotland	6,021
Wales	2,231
Northern Ireland	1,630

1. How to raise awareness of the harms associated with the use of legal highs among the public and those working in the relevant public services.
2. How effectively a partnership approach to tackling the issue of legal highs in Wales is being coordinated, both within Wales and between the Welsh and UK Governments

We believe that a source of information that relates directly to people's honest and documented experiences using any NPS is an invaluable resource to highlight dangers and harms should they arise. It also allows people to discuss openly and honestly the effects and any potentially harmful effects of the particular substance.

Due to the community feeling and the relationships between members it provides a very open, honest and we believe unique resource where people can discuss and document the effects of any NPS.

The forum is moderated extensively and people who may be experiencing issues arising from use of NPS in any capacity are spoken to on a private and personal level to provide them with support in whichever capacity any issues are presented. This may include signposting to services in their area, advice and guidance and an open channel of communication at any time if they are in crisis or needing support.

There is also a real time chat resource that can be utilised in order to provide comfort, reassurance and support to anyone who may need advice and guidance.

Reports from the community allow us to monitor reactions between specific NPS and poly drug use.

Whilst specific information is not given regarding dosage of any particular substance a guideline can be provided to people who need that information. We specifically always advise people to use low doses and to incrementally increase a dose in order that they find their own personal tolerances. This is highlighted frequently with the underlying message that every person is an individual and indeed their response based on an individual substance may differ hugely from one individual to another and that to provide information would be unethical and dangerous for us to do so.

The information that is provided and discussed by the members is current and often members receive new NPS prior to them being more generally or widely available. This again provides a unique platform for safety and harm reduction.

This year we have set up links with John Ramsey of Tic Tac, Fiona Measham www.wearetheloop.co.uk and also Paul Bunt, Drug Strategy Manager all of whom sit on the ACMD. We have also worked with Chris Russell from www.mylegalhigh.org a survey shortly due to be evaluated around NPS,

This has enabled a two way communication whereby we are able to alert the relevant parties to any NPS that could potentially have harmful or unexpected reactions. We also receive information on NPS in circulation that may be available to people or mis- sold under the guise of it being a different substance.

WEDINOS has been an invaluable resource allowing members to gain credible results on substances they have may obtained and be unsure of the actual product, similarly they are able to check if they have experienced an unexpected reaction to a substance. The effects of this are twofold, they can alert members to any potential issues and also advise on the source of the product so other members can avoid making purchases from a specific vendor.

We also undertake work in conjunction with Festival Welfare Services, a Swansea based service who provide welfare and crisis intervention at many music festivals, www.festivalwelfareservices.co.uk

This enables us to link in with current trends and to provide advice and information to people around harm reduction in situ.

Regulation of any NPS at this juncture in time is conceivably the best method for reducing harm amongst users of NPS. The banning of substances has only served to drive them into markets whereby they are unable to have any kind of quality control or comeback for users. Synthesis of the products has been shown to be of poor quality once the substances are no longer available through previous methods.

Banning also encourages bulk buying of the substances which in turn may encourage people to use the substances in a more reckless manner, using higher doses and more frequently which in turn has the unwanted effect of increasing harm for people.

Banning substances has also effectively removed certain NPS which had been researched albeit on non-clinical level, but had proven that use when following guidelines provided by reports from users to have minimal health risks associated with them. It is clear that for every substance banned only a small chemical change needs to be effected to circumnavigate any current law surrounding that substance, this proves not only to be frustrating for the NPS community but effectively sends them back to the drawing board in researching the efficacy and safety of new products.

It also needs to be noted that there are many people who use NPS responsibly and safely in all manner of environments. Whilst there are risks and dangers associated with any of these substances they are still massively overshadowed by the legal and widely available drug alcohol. It would seem prudent to take into account the costs to public services between the two drugs and to take this into account when addressing any new kind of policies.

In conclusion it is clear to us that whilst on occasion we see problematic use as with any substance the age bracket with which we are dealing 25+ seem to have a much clearer understanding of the risks and harms associated with NPS. We are currently looking at a new website aimed at under 25's which will include topical and current harm reduction advice and guidelines for dosing. Dangers of self-diagnosis and medicating using analogues and advice for concerned parents and any professional bodies who may require training and information. We believe that we hold some of the most valuable information regarding NPS and are well placed within a safe environment to be able to monitor the effects of NPS.