

## Editorial

In this second issue of the Newsletter, we have contributions from 7 laboratories. One contribution is from the Department of Scientific Services, Brunei Darussalam. A big thank you for your contribution and continuing support. We hope that those laboratories which have not contributed will be able to do so in the next issue of the Newsletter.

In this issue, many laboratories highlighted the abuse of methamphetamine, either in the crystalline form (known commonly as "ice") or in illicit tablets, in their countries. This is one drug which has rapidly emerged to become a common drug of abuse in the region. We hope that through this Newsletter, we will be able to learn from one another in the fight against drug abuse.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish our friends and readers a happy and prosperous new year.

*Happy reading!*

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### *Ketamine in Mineral Water*

The Narcotics Laboratory in Singapore encountered many cases of ketamine since 1997. In August 2001, it received an unusual exhibit where ketamine was dissolved in mineral water.

A suspicious man arriving from Cambodia was stopped at the arrival hall at the Changi International Airport. The Narcotics Officers found that he was carrying a bottle of mineral water which looked clear. Upon vigorous shaking, there was a lot of froth seen on the surface of the water. The man was further searched and amongst other things, a talcum powder bottle with its cap intact, a packet of white powdery substance and a foil containing one "Erimin 5" tablet were found. These items were sent to the Narcotics Laboratory for analysis.



An aliquot of the liquid was removed and evaporated to dryness. The resulting white residue was analysed and confirmed to be ketamine by GC/MS. The liquid was then analysed directly by HPLC and found to contain 46 mg of ketamine per ml of water. The white powdery substance found in the talcum powder bottle was found to contain 0.81 gram of ketamine per gram of powder.

The accused person was subsequently charged in the Surbordinate Court and sentenced to seven years imprisonment and seven strokes of the cane. 🇸🇬

*Contributed by the Centre for Forensic Science, Singapore*

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## *Drug Trend in the Philippines*

### **I. Methamphetamine Hydrochloride (Shabu)**

Methamphetamine hydrochloride or Shabu still remains as the number one drug of abuse in terms of popularity, based on the number of related raids and number of persons arrested. Bulk of the Shabu were seized in buy-bust operations and significant incidents encountered all over the country, whether at the port of entry and final destinations, and even in the waters or in the coastal areas throughout the archipelago.

For the past five (5) years, the Philippines started to become a haven of drug syndicates involved in the manufacture of methamphetamine hydrochloride, with the discovery of sophisticated clandestine laboratories capable of yielding multi-kilo quantities, which could supply the domestic abuser population and still have more for illegal export. Some laboratories are makeshift in nature, employing crude laboratory set-ups and mostly operated in residences or office rooms, which allow easy dismantling and transfer to other places. Methamphetamine or Shabu trafficking continues as well as exports to other countries.

Shabu business is still being controlled/operated by both foreign-based and domestic-based syndicates. There are presently quite a number of local drug syndicates involved in Shabu trafficking in the Philippines. It is considered "big business", in the sense that large amounts of cash change hands regularly in the course of a one-day run, to include cash paid as bribe money and as other instruments of corruption. Significant seizures of the drug in bulk and large quantities involved mostly Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong nationals.

### **II. Marijuana**

Marijuana due to its availability and affordability in the illicit market is still one of the most abused drugs in the country. Cannabis cultivation continued to proliferate nationwide despite intensive cannabis eradication operations launched by drug law enforcement. The areas considered as prime producers of cannabis in the country are still Northern Luzon (comprising of Regions 1,2 and CAR), Central Visayas (Region 7) and Central, Southern and Western Mindanao (Region 11, 12, 9 and ARMM). Mountainous terrain usually inaccessible by motorized land transports, and the overt presence of communist insurgents and Muslim separatist rebels characterize these areas.

Although there are no documented reports as to the presence of clandestine hashish laboratory, the persistent presence of the drug in the illicit market shows the existence of such.

The Philippines still remains as a source country for marijuana/marijuana products exported illegally to Japan, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, Australia and USA.

### **III. Heroin and Cocaine**

For other prohibited drugs such as heroin and cocaine, the Philippines is still being made as a major transit point in international drug trafficking, evident with the arrest of foreign nationals and seizure of significant quantities of heroin and cocaine. In previous year, aggressive trafficking activities by foreign nationals resurfaced and the use of express mail was exploited in response to successful law enforcement pressure against courier activity.

### **IV. Other drugs**

Drugs of foreign origin such as "Ecstasy" and "Bangkok" pills continued to be smuggled into the country. This is evident with the seizures of tablets of "Ecstasy" and the availability of "Bangkok" pills in the market.

The abuse of pharmaceutical preparations such as Nubian injectables, cough/cold preparations and volatile substance, such as "Rugby", continues to remain popular during the period under review, although with the monitoring controls being imposed, it is expected that there will be decreased in abuse of pharmaceutical preparations.

### **V. Precursors and Essential Chemicals**

There is no recorded legitimate importation of ephedrine hydrochloride. The precursor that commonly comes in to the country is that of pseudoephedrine, which was imported in bulk by registered drug manufacturers for medical purposes for used in the manufacture of cough preparation. However, with the seizure of bulk and significant quantities of ephedrine hydrochloride and other PECS, and the discovery of three (3) shabu laboratories, it is presumed that availability of ephedrine hydrochloride and other PECS in the illicit trafficking or smuggling of the chemicals.

### **VI. Illegal Consumption**

Mono-drug use still prevails on the manner of drug intake by the country's clients as reported by the treatment and rehabilitation centers duly recognized by the Dangerous Drugs Board. Methamphetamine hydrochloride (shabu) still maintains its popularity as the number one drug of abuse among the center confinees, followed by marijuana. Other most commonly abused drugs in the country are Corex Dm, Corex Plain and Brownies/cannabis cake. The alarming trend of drug abuse in the workplace has also been confirmed.

## Profile of a typical Filipino drug abuser (centre-based)

Age	Mean age of 27 years
Sex	Ratio of male to female 12:1
Civil Status	Single: 56.99% Married: 31.61%
Family Size	Three (3) to four (4) siblings
Occupation	<p> <b>Workers/Employees:</b> 35.99%  <b>Unemployed:</b> 24.99%  <b>Self-employed:</b> 15.39%  <b>Students:</b> 9.19%  <b>OSY:</b> 4.21%         </p>
Educational Attainment	College Level: 28.07% High School Level: 26.81%
Economic Status	Average monthly income of P6,168.00
Place of residence	Urban (specifically Metro Manila)
Duration of Drug Taking	More than two (2) years
I.Q.	Average
Nature of Drug-Taking	Monodrug use
Drugs of Abuse	Shabu, Marijuana

### VII. Drug Law Enforcement Efforts

1. Consolidation of the drug enforcement and prevention efforts of the national government for an effective anti-drug campaign at the national down to the barangay levels.
2. Networking with the local government units and non-government organizations.
3. Establishment of 24-hour hotline to receive information on illegal drug activities and requests for assistance.
4. Conduct of clearing operations using the Barangay Anti-Narcotics Action Team (BANAT).
5. Intensification of inspection of mails and packages passing through the postal system and major forwarding companies.

6. Enhancement of capability of first-line inspectors through training in drug identification and detection.
7. Enhance coordination with foreign counterparts and international cooperation with ASEAN-member countries and other foreign countries, for an active and up-to-date exchange of intelligence information.

### VIII. Assessment

1. Traffic in and abuse of heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and amphetamine type stimulant drug and other opiate drugs will continue to pose as potential problem.
2. Foreign criminal group that engaged in drug trafficking would continue to use the Philippines as an important drug transit area due to its strategic location in the international sea and air route.
3. Extent of marijuana cultivation/production will remain geographically widespread and planted in difficult and inaccessible terrain.
4. Modus operandi of drug traffickers will be more sophisticated.
5. Extend of abuse and traffic in pharmaceutical and preparations not classified as dangerous drugs, such as “Bangkok” pills and “Ecstasy” will continue their present level.
6. Drug abusers will be compelled to ship any readily available substitute drugs such as cough syrups, volatile substances and anesthesia.
7. The number of persons involved in methamphetamine hydrochloride trafficking is expected to increase due to the profitability of its illicit trade. 🇵🇭

Contributed by the Dangerous Drugs Board, Philippines

## DRUG SITUATION REPORT JANUARY-JUNE 2001\*

Name of drug	Quantity	No. of arrest conducted	No. of persons arrested
<b>Cannabis</b>			
Plants (no.)	412,50	6	5
Seedlings (no.)	534,500	1	0
Leaves (gms)	129,385	143	260
Cigarettes (no.)	95	2	2
Seeds (gms)	30,000	0	0
<b>Methamphetamine</b>			
Hydrochloride (gms)	129,278	1,953	3,063
Amphetamine (gms)	2,050	2	2
Ecstasy (gms)	1.72	1	4
<b>Others</b>			
Rugby (ml)	838	11	18
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>2,119</b>	<b>3,354</b>

\* Based on data and statistics gathered by the Intelligence Staff from deas. Incomplete data. Data are subjected to change upon receipt of other accomplishment reports.

## Drugs of Abuse in Macao SAR

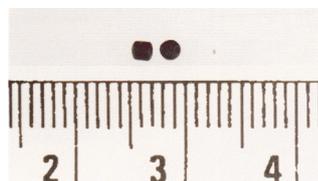
Until November 2001, the Forensic Laboratory of Macao has received a total number of 6,028.5 tablets and of these, 3,220.5 are "Ecstasy" tablets which account for 53.42%. In addition, of the total number of "Ecstasy" tablets seized, 3.61% contain just MDMA and 22.17% contain just MDA. What can be said of these figures is that the majority of "Ecstasy" tablets in Macao are mixtures of stimulants and adulterants which are most unusual. Some examples are given below.

Tablet	Dimensions (mm)	MDMA	MDA	Ice	Ketamine	Others
	8.00x5.44	✓		✓	✓	Caffeine
	8.25x5.27			✓	✓	
	8.54x5.94			✓	✓	Antipyrine
	8.22x5.03			✓	✓	Caffeine
	10.73x6.91			✓	✓	Caffeine, Methylphenobarbital, Phenobarbital, Diazepam
	10.62x6.78			✓	✓	Caffeine, Phenacetin, Chlorpromazine, Phentermine
	10.75x6.93			✓	✓	Caffeine
	8.20x5.05	✓				
	8.68x6.03	✓		✓	✓	Caffeine
	8.16x5.57			✓	✓	Caffeine
	8.20x5.63			✓	✓	Caffeine, Paracetamol, Phenazone, Promethazine
	8.16x3.99	✓				Imipramine
	8.17x4.86	✓				

Tablet	Dimensions (mm)	MDMA	MDA	Ice	Ketamine	Others
	8.19x5.85			✓	✓	Caffeine, Paracetamol
	8.11x4.76	✓				
	8.06x4.20	✓				
	8.10x4.52	✓				
	8.15x2.95		✓			
	8.21x3.75		✓			
	8.08x3.26		✓		✓	
	8.28x4.32		✓			Promethazine
	8.19x4.54	✓				
	8.36x5.79			✓	✓	
	8.29x5.39			✓	✓	Caffeine
	8.09x5.47	✓		✓	✓	Caffeine
	9.14x5.44			✓	✓	Imipramine, Chlorpromazine

Recently, the laboratory has also encountered LSD. Interestingly, this drug is so small that it has been named "Black Sesame". The "Black Sesame" is of 5 to 6 mg in weight and has a dimension of approximately 1.78 mm x 9 mm.

Contributed by the Forensic Laboratory, Macao SAR



## Popular in Ho

Rave parties have in recent years gained increasing popularity amongst youngsters in Hong Kong. The use of drugs in rave parties has been growing and the most frequently encountered drugs in rave parties are the phenethylamine type stimulants including "Ecstasy" and methamphetamine, and ketamine.

### Ecstasy

"Ecstasy" was originally used as a street name for the substance 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (abbreviated as MDMA), which is a member of a chemical group known as phenethylamines. Today, the term "Ecstasy" appears to have been used loosely and collectively to include other members of the phenethylamines such as MDA and MDEA.

Nearly all samples analysed were in the form of tablets of various colours. The tablets were usually embossed with logos and/or markings. The typical weight of a tablet was around 200 to 500 mg and the amount of drug was between 100 to 150 mg though doses of as little as 2 mg or as large as 240 mg were found. Chemical analysis also revealed the presence of chemical adulterants, such as caffeine and ketamine.

### Methamphetamine (MA)

Tablets containing MA first appeared in 1996. Recently it became a popular rave party drug. Some of these MA tablets had logos and/or markings similar to those found on "Ecstasy" tablets and sold under the name of "Ecstasy". Chemical analysis revealed that the strength of MA in these tablets varied widely between 5 to 60 mg. These MA tablets also mixed with various other drugs including ketamine, diazepam and caffeine.

## Rave Party Drugs in Hong Kong SAR

Imipramine, clomipramine and chlorpromazine were also detected in the recently submitted items.

The following is a collection of images of some of the "Ecstasy" & MA tablets that were recently encountered in Hong Kong.

	
MDA	MDMA, caffeine
	
MDA, ketamine, clomipramine, chlorpromazine	MA, diazepam, ketamine, phenobarbitone

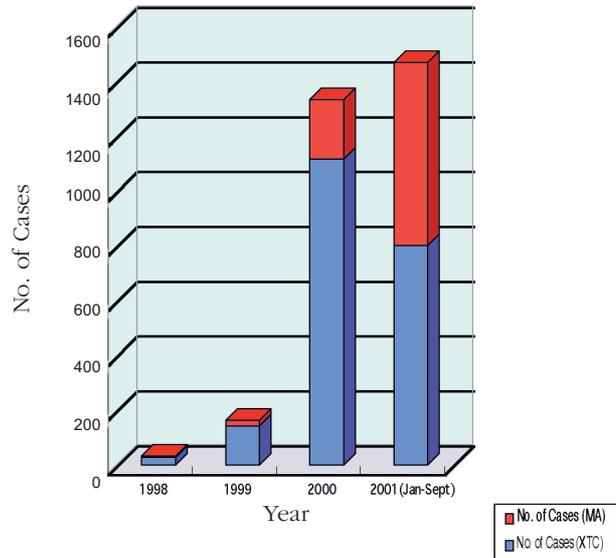
	
MA, diazepam, ketamine, phenobarbitone	MA, diazepam, ketamine, phenobarbitone
	
MA, ketamine, imipramine, clomipramine, chlorpromazine	MDMA

### Ketamine

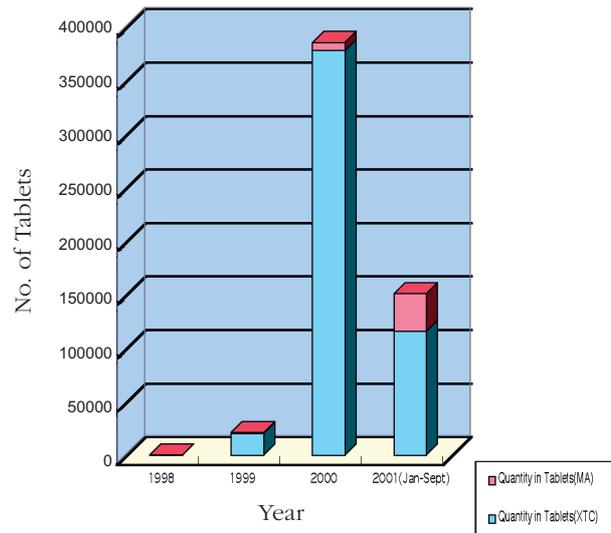
The abuse of ketamine first surfaced in 1997 and is now a widely abused drug. The powder form of ketamine was mostly encountered, which was usually packed in colourful paper packets. Formerly, the ketamine samples analysed were almost entirely in the pure state. Recently, adulterated samples were increasingly encountered, some of which may contain ketamine below 50%. These low purity ketamine samples were mixed with drugs including caffeine, antipyrine and chlorpheniramine. 🌿

*Contributed by the Government Laboratory, Hong Kong SAR*

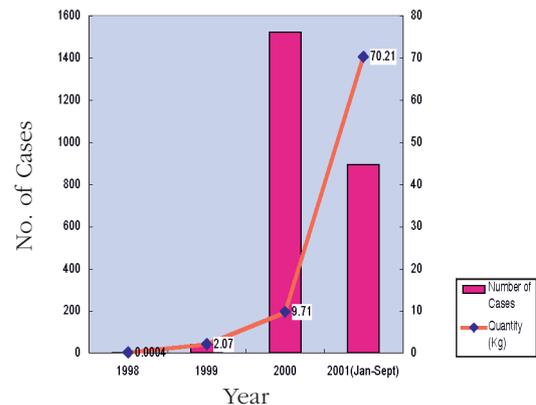
No. of Cases of "Ecstasy" & "MA" tablets



Quantity of "Ecstasy" & "MA" Tablets



Examined Figures of Ketamine HCl



## The Changing Drug Scene in Malaysia

### Introduction

Traditionally, illicit heroin and cannabis have been the most commonly encountered drugs of abuse in Malaysia. To date, even though illicit heroin and cannabis continue to be the major drugs of abuse in Malaysia, it is common to see the emergence of new types of drugs of abuse appearing in the Malaysian drug scene.

### Phenethylamine Type Stimulants

In 1996, the country witnessed the emergence of phenethylamine type stimulants such as 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), MDA and MDEA in the forms of round tablet of various colours and with different embossments. Amongst them, MDMA was the most commonly encountered substance of this class of compounds.

With the aim of avoiding the long arm of the law, new designer drug of this class of compounds such as N-methyl-1-(3,4-methylenedioxyphenyl)-2-butanamine (MBDB) was discovered in 1997. This drug, which was not listed as a "Dangerous Drug" in the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 in

1997, was subsequently listed in 1998. However, MBDB disappeared from the Malaysian drug scene in 1998 just as suddenly as it appeared in 1997. It has not been detected since then.

### Methamphetamine

The methamphetamine scourge began in the year 1997. At that time, small quantities of methamphetamine in crystal and tablet forms were encountered. The illicitly produced methamphetamine tablets, embossed with various inscriptions/or letters were sold as "Ecstasy Tablets" to the unsuspecting buyers. This prompted the authority to list methamphetamine as a "Dangerous Drug" in the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 in 1997. Today, this drug has become a permanent feature of the Malaysian drug scene. Quantities of methamphetamine examined had since increased by several folds.

### Ketamine

Ketamine, an anaesthetic drug for veterinary use, was first encountered in 1998. Since then the amounts had escalated. The ketamine analysed by the laboratory

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## *Psychotropic Drugs: A New Wave of Drug Abuse in Vietnam*

Although narcotic drugs such as opium and heroin still remain as the most popular subjects for abuse and addict in Vietnam, however, from the beginning of the Millenium, the use of illegal psychotropic drugs has suddenly emerged in the big cities. It marked a sign for a new trend in drug abuse in Vietnam and it is of great concern nationwide.

According to the police statistics in 2000, a total of 10,188 drug related cases were uncovered with the seizure of 460 kg opium, 49.3 kg heroin, 2193 kg cannabis and 12.5 kg of synthetic drugs (mainly ATS group). In addition, 74,274 ampoules of tranquilizers were also confiscated, of those, almost all were diazepam.

The abuse of opium tends to decrease, but not heroin. Especially, from the beginning of 2001, the abuse of ATS group has been on the sharp rise among juveniles in the big cities. Besides methamphetamine, which had been seized at a total amount of 6,025 tablets in 1999, a number of cases involved other ATS, the MDMA, have recently uncovered. In one of the big cases, the amounts of MDMA seized were up to 8,000 tablets. Other psychotropic drugs such as MDA, MDEA, LSD and ketamine have also appeared in big cities.

Except a case in which the production of 234 kg of methamphetamine by a foreigner was detected in 1995, it is believed that almost all the ATS drugs and other new psychotropic drugs were illegally imported from overseas. Their appearances were often as the type of tablets or capsules with diverse shape, colour and marking, some of which have never seen in Vietnam. It is said that although the prices are much higher than heroin but with the convenience and the rapid and strong effects on the mood, these drugs are now the most desired among the juveniles in the cities. Some specimens seized recently in Haiphong, a major port city, are given (see pictures on the right).

In addition to the new drugs of abuse, the concealment of drugs has been further diversified and has become more ingenious recently. For example, diazepam was encapsulated into the capsules which have legal trademark. Similarly, in order to limit the degree of punishment under the Law on Preventing and Combating Narcotic Drugs, the street heroin tend to have high purity, usually 86.6 %(base) as in the White Heroin type, and 81.8 % as in the Faded (Off)-White type. 📷

*Contributed by the Institute of Forensic Science, Vietnam*

appeared in the form of round tablets and white crystalline substance of high purity. In most of these tablets, methamphetamine/MDMA were also detected.

In an effort to control the rising trend of ketamine abuse in Malaysia, the drug was listed as a "Dangerous Drug" in the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 in May 2001.

## Benzodiazepines

There is always a ready market for the benzodiazepines type of drug in Malaysia, The illicitly produced tablets were sold under the brand-name "Erimin 5". Among the abuse of these sedative-hypnotic drugs, nimetazepam was the most prevalent. To curb the abuse, as with ketamine, nimetazepam was listed as a "Dangerous Drug" in the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 in May 2001.

## Opium

For the past ten years, there had been relatively few cases involving opium (both raw and prepared opium). The most recent one, involving 15 kg of raw opium was seized in 1999. Otherwise most of the cases encountered

involved small quantities of prepared opium used by the local drug addicts.

## Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)

The ease of communication and transportation by air and the innovative methods of concealment, dangerous drugs which have been regularly encountered in the western world are beginning to appear here. One of such drugs is lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). This new hallucinogen pill (8500 pills in all), called "Black Sesame", was detected in September 2001. This drug comes in the form of small round black pill with a diameter of about 1 mm was discovered for the first time in this particular form in Malaysia.

## Cocaine

Since 1996, there had not been any fresh cases received by the laboratory indicating that cocaine is not among one of the popular drugs in Malaysia.

*Contributed by the Department of Chemistry, Malaysia*



Size: 0.7 cm (diameter) x 0.4 cm (thickness)  
Content: MDA (29.3%)



Size: 0.7 cm x 1 cm x 0.5 cm  
Content: ketamine, caffeine, methamphetamine (0.35%)



Content: opium, morphine (0.4%)



Content: ketamine, caffeine, methamphetamine (0.75%)

## Methamphetamine Abuse Encountered in Brunei Darussalam

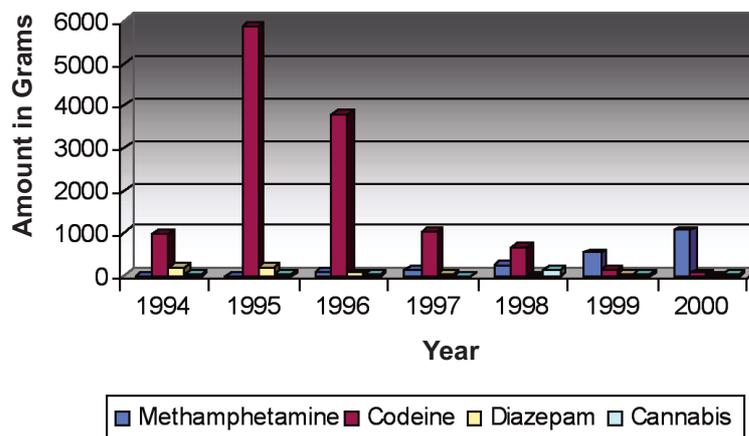
Prior to 1996, the common drugs of abuse analyzed routinely by the Narcotics Laboratory of the Department of Scientific Services were opiates (codeine), benzodiazepines (diazepam) and cannabis. Methamphetamine made its first appearance in 1996.

Methamphetamine received by the laboratory normally appear as white crystals with a purity range from 70–80%. Many of the ready-to-use methamphetamine crystal were packed in short plastic straws and weighed around 10-20 milligrams per packet.

In 1997, a sudden surge of methamphetamine cases dominated the laboratory routine analyses for drugs of abuse. We encountered a sharp drop in codeine, diazepam and cannabis abuse were reduced to very low. Since then methamphetamine has been the choice drug as seen in the graph below. The Narcotics Laboratory utilizes EMIT as the screening tool and GC/FID and GC/MS for confirmation and quantitation.

*Contributed by the Department of Scientific Services, Brunei Darussalam*

Drugs of Abused Trend from 1994 to 2000



### Formation of Health Sciences Authority in Singapore

The former Department of Scientific Services, Singapore has been reorganised under a newly formed Statutory Board, the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) on 1 April 2001. The HSA incorporates five former government agencies with a mission to support healthcare services and regulation, serve the administration of justice and enhance safety in the community. The Centre for Forensic Science is one of the 8 professional centres under the HSA.

### Editorial Team

Dr Lee Tong Kooi  
(LEE\_Tong\_Kooi@HSA.gov.sg)

Dr Lui Chi Pang  
(LUI\_Chi\_Pang@HSA.gov.sg)

Ms Merula Mangudi  
(MERULA\_Mangudi@HSA.gov.sg)

Ms Tan Ying Ying  
(TAN\_Ying\_Ying@HSA.gov.sg)

### Please send your comments and suggestions to :

Narcotics Laboratory  
Centre for Forensic Science  
Health Sciences Authority  
11 Outram Road  
Singapore 169078  
Telephone: (65) 2290712  
Fax No: (65) 2290749  
Website: [www.hsa.gov.sg](http://www.hsa.gov.sg)