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Naphyrone

What is it?

Naphyrone (naphthylpyrovalerone) is a white crystalline powder often sold under the brand name NRG-1 / Energy-1. It is a stimulant drug which has a close structural resemblance to the cathinones (for example, mephedrone and methylenedioxypyrovalerone or MDPV).

Pyrovalerone, a Class C drug to which naphyrone is related, used to be prescribed in the UK to treat lethargy and fatigue, but its use was discontinued after concerns over the potential for misuse. Naphyrone is consumed either by sniffing or 'bombing' (swallowing the drug in a cigarette paper).

The drug has been sold variously as 'plant food' or 'pond cleaner' as a way of hiding its use as a psychoactive drug to circumvent medicines and consumer legislation. NRG1, which may or may not have contained naphyrone, retailed online at around £12 – £15 per gram prior to the drug's classification.

Legal status

Despite the generic definition used to bring mephedrone and related cathinones under the control of the Misuse of Drugs Act in April 2010, naphyrone remained outside the scope of the legislation. Recognising that vendors previously selling mephedrone had either switched or were claiming to have switched to selling naphyrone, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) made a recommendation on 16 July 2010 that naphyrone should be classified as a Class B drug. On 23 July, legislation was passed in Parliament to that effect. As a Class B drug, maximum penalties for possession are 5 years imprisonment plus a fine and for supply are 14 years imprisonment and a fine.

Prevalence

We do not know how many people are using naphyrone but internet searches for the drug did appear to rise following the classification of mephedrone and the cathinones in April.

Another complicating factor in understanding the scale of naphyrone use is that, prior to napyhrone's classification in July, vendors were passing off surplus, pre-ban stock of the classified cathinones as 'new' and 'legal' naphyrone. Before July, many of the samples of the supposed 'legal high' NRG1 tested by forensics experts were in fact revealed to be illegal drugs such as mephedrone or MDPV.

Effects/risks

Although toxicity or safety data is scarce, the ACMD described naphyrone in its report to government as having "high potency by comparison with previous cathinones or MDMA", suggesting that its use was therefore "likely to be associated with a higher risk of accidental overdose." The ACMD report that a dose of 25mg is all that is needed for users to feel an effect; with such a tiny quantity, it would be difficult for a user to measure the drug out with any degree of accuracy.

Potency aside, the physical and mental health risks of using naphyrone are broadly comparable to those of the cathinones i.e. strain on the heart and cardiac system, hyperthermia, risk of psychosis or anxiety and the potential for dependence to develop. In extreme cases, amphetamine-like drugs can kill due to cardiovascular collapse.

In the long term, it appears as though naphyrone does have a dependency potential.

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