



ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

INTER-AMERICAN DRUG ABUSE CONTROL COMMISSION

cicad

**Ephedrine and Pseudoephedrine
Use in the Illicit Production of Methamphetamine**

Ephedrine and Pseudoephedrine Use in the Illicit Production of Methamphetamine

Background

Effective actions to fight the traffic of substances such as heroin, cocaine, etc, have led to the emergence of the so called “*synthetic drugs*” such as methamphetamine. Methamphetamine can be easily produced domestically using ingredients such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine which are commonly found in cold products. Its low cost and ease of synthesis make it an attractive and easy drug to produce and sell. This phenomenon has become a profitable alternative for multinational organized crime.

Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are included in Table I of the 1988 UN Convention. As signatories to this Convention, countries in this region have implemented controls for the import, export and production of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine as bulk chemicals (raw materials) and single entity pharmaceutical products.

Since there are controls in place for raw material and single entity products, the clandestine laboratory operators are using combination products containing pseudoephedrine to produce methamphetamine. This has been seen in countries such as the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The illicit production of methamphetamine has been a concern in the United States for some time. In recent years, it has spread to its neighbouring countries, Canada and Mexico. This has led to an increase in the diversion of “combination” pharmaceutical products containing pseudoephedrine. Diversion generally migrates from region to region seeking voids in legislation. Therefore as imports may decrease in some countries, they may increase in others. This is a serious concern for CICAD member states.

Checklist to avoid the diversion of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine

In order to avoid the diversion of pharmaceutical products which contain ephedrine and pseudoephedrine at the national level, consideration should be given to the following steps:

1. Limit the quantity which can be sold at the retail level;
2. Limit the access of OTC cold products containing pseudoephedrine or ephedrine;
3. Encourage industry to examine ways to formulate their pseudoephedrine and ephedrine products so they cannot be used in the illicit production of methamphetamine;
4. Rationalization of the imports so that they are in balance with legitimate domestic demands; and,
5. Promote the pre-export notification of pharmaceutical products which contain pseudoephedrine/ephedrine, including combination products, by all CICAD member states and encourage third countries shipping to this hemisphere to do likewise