

# ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE MISUSE OF DRUGS (ACMD)

Chair: Professor Sir Michael Rawlins

Secretary: Stuart Harwood

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5 June 2006

Dear Home Secretary

## **Methylamphetamine**

Last year the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs reviewed the legal classification of methylamphetamine under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Both amphetamine (and its salts) and methylamphetamine are in Class B and the Council's 2005 report recommended that this position be retained.

The Council reviewed its decision at its meeting on 25th May 2006 and, in the light of further evidence, advises that methylamphetamine (and its salts) be re-classified as a Class A substance. Methylamphetamine is, chemically, closely related to amphetamine. Its pharmacological effects, however, are not only more intense and differ qualitatively from those of amphetamine. Moreover, unlike any form of amphetamine, methylamphetamine hydrochloride (sometimes known as "ice" or "crystal meth") is smokable and when used in this fashion can produce effects that are similar to "crack cocaine" though considerably longer lasting.

Over the past few years there has been a substantial increase in the illicit use of methylamphetamine in the Far East, parts of Europe and North America with grave consequences but, so far, there has been relatively little evidence of misuse in the UK.

The Council's 2005 report made it very clear that it considered methylamphetamine to be, potentially, very harmful to both individuals and to society. The Council gave very detailed consideration, at that time, as to whether it should recommend its re-classification to Class A. After considerable discussion the Council decided against giving such a move for two key reasons: first, that there was little evidence that there was significant use of methylamphetamine in the UK; and, secondly, it was concerned that re-classification might draw unwanted attention to methylamphetamine's potent properties. Your predecessor accepted the Council's advice.

When the Council re-considered the position at its May meeting, evidence was presented to show that:

- 1) there are indications that the use of methylamphetamine is now starting to become more widespread; and

2) the police have become aware of the existence of a small number of illicit laboratories synthesising the substance.

In addition, over the past 6 to 9 months , here has been considerable media interest in the properties and use of methylamphetamine. Furthermore, as a Class A drug, the police would have powers to close down “ice houses” as they currently do with “crack houses”.

In the light of this new information, the Council now advises that methylamphetamine is re-classified to Class A under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. In doing so it also wishes to draw your attention to two other uncomfortable facts. First, the synthesis of methylamphetamine is simple; it can be carried out in a domestic kitchen; and requires no sophisticated equipment yet is highly dangerous through the risk of explosions and fires and the waste products are very environmentally toxic. Second, the precursors (ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, red phosphorus and iodine) are readily available along with instructions on their use. The Council therefore urges that, at the same time, further steps are taken to limit their availability.

The ACMD has chosen to submit further advice to you at this stage, in advance of the 12 month deadline we set ourselves, because of the threat potentially posed by this substance. We had undertaken to provide you with further, updated advice by November 2006, however we were maintaining a watching brief over this issue, and decided to act sooner rather than later.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Rawlins', written in a cursive style.

Professor Sir Michael Rawlins FMedSci