

## A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

### *New Maryland Drug Early Warning System (DEWS) Research Series Investigates Increase in PCP Use and Availability in Prince George's County*

Several indicators monitored by DEWS staff suggest that the use and availability of PCP are on the rise in several Maryland counties, including Prince George's County. For example, PCP-related treatment admissions reached a five-year high among Prince George's County residents in 2003. As part of an innovative research series, *DEWS Investigates*, DEWS staff are conducting rapid "mini-studies" to investigate specific trends or questions identified by the monitoring of quantitative indicators. The first of these studies consisted of two sets of in-depth interviews with 16 juvenile offenders and 20 adult arrestees in Prince George's County to investigate perceptions of PCP use. Following are highlights of these interviews.

- Adults and juveniles report that PCP has increased in popularity, particularly the use of "dippers," which are tobacco cigarettes or marijuana joints or blunts dipped in a liquid substance containing PCP. "Boat"—marijuana or parsley laced with PCP and rolled into a joint or blunt—was reported as a less common way of using PCP.
- Many of the juveniles interviewed did not think that dippers were made with PCP. Instead, youths often cited embalming fluid as the primary ingredient and stated that it is cut with other ingredients, such as starter fluid or baby oil. In fact, most of the juveniles interviewed "maintained that dippers are easy to obtain, whereas PCP is not widely available" (p. 2).
- In contrast, most adult arrestees interviewed reported that PCP is the primary ingredient in the fluid used to make dippers. They also identified similar secondary ingredients as those mentioned by juveniles, such as embalming fluid and a variety of animal tranquilizers. In addition, some adult arrestees reported that dealers are putting pills of ecstasy into liquid vials of PCP.

DEWS researchers were unable to determine what proportion of dippers, if any, were made with embalming fluid instead of PCP. The confusing connection between PCP and embalming fluid, which has been reported in other studies in Texas<sup>1</sup> and Washington, D.C.,<sup>2</sup> is complicated by the fact that the term "embalming fluid" is also a slang term referring to liquid PCP. Hence, many people who use dippers—especially youth—do not know exactly what they are consuming. The researchers recommend that drug seizures suspected of containing PCP be tested to identify all the component ingredients. In addition, they conclude that "the findings suggest a need for focused educational interventions warning youth that dippers contain PCP and are harmful" (p. 4).

<sup>1</sup>Elwood, W.N. "Fry: A Study of Adolescents' Use of Embalming Fluid with Marijuana and Tobacco," Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, 1998.

<sup>2</sup>Wish, E.D., Artigiani, E., Brown, J., Canham, S., Gray, T., & Mattheson, C. "PCP Use and Trends in Washington, D.C.: Two Rapid Methods for Investigating Leads from Indicator Data." Presentation at the Community Epidemiology Work Group Meeting, Atlanta, December 2003.

SOURCE: Drug Early Warning System (DEWS), Center for Substance Abuse Research (CESAR), "DEWS Investigates: What Is Behind the Increase in PCP in Prince George's County?" February 2004. Available online at [www.dewsonline.org](http://www.dewsonline.org). For more information, contact Erin Artigiani at [erin@cesar.umd.edu](mailto:erin@cesar.umd.edu).

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