



## Second Generation “Bath Salts” Emergent in Ohio: Presence of Flakka Becoming Known

OSAM-o-Gram

The Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network

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In an OSAM-O-Gram dated September 2015, the OSAM Network reported that bath salts were rarely available throughout OSAM regions based on field data and crime lab data collected through January 2015 (<http://mha.ohio.gov>). Table 1 illustrates the trend over time in the change in number of bath salts cases processed by Ohio’s Bureau of Criminal Investigation’s (BCI) three major crime labs. From January 2015 through January 2016, BCI labs reported that the number of bath salts cases had increased, as the label “bath salts” has been extended to encompass second generation bath salts. Many cases have been found to be “flakka.”

**Table 1. Change in Number of “Bath Salts” Cases Processed by BCI Labs\***

BCI Lab	June 2011	January 2012	June 2012	January 2013	June 2013	January 2014	June 2014	January 2015	June 2015	January 2016
Richfield		↑	↑	↑		↑	↑	↓	↑	↑
London	↑	↑	↑		↑	↑		↓	↑	↑
Bowling Green	↑	↑	↑	↓				↓	↓	↑

\*Note: Upward arrows indicate an increase while downward arrows indicate a decrease; absence of an arrow indicates no change/no report

Alpha-pyrrolidinopentiophenone (alpha-PVP or a-PVP, aka “flakka,” or “gravel” in some parts of the US) is a synthetic cathinone similar to bath salts. It is considered a second generation bath salt, as alpha-PVP has become a replacement for the chemicals of the first generation bath salts (methyldone, mephedrone, MDPV) which were made illegal in 2011.

Many drug producers find it easier to change the chemical structure of a substance to something that is legal rather than take the risk of dealing a controlled substance. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) placed a temporary ban on alpha-PVP in March of 2014; however, drug producers have found a way to work around the ban by placing a label on their products which reads, “Not for human consumption” ([www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), May 26, 2015). Alpha-PVP was made a Schedule I controlled substance in Ohio in December 2012.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA),

“Alpha-PVP takes the form of a white or pink, foul-smelling crystal that can be eaten, snorted, injected or vaporized in an e-cigarette or similar device. Vaporizing, which sends the drug very quickly into the bloodstream, may make it particularly easy to overdose. Like other drugs of this type, alpha-PVP can cause a condition called ‘excited delirium’ that involves hyper stimulation, paranoia and hallucinations that can lead to violent aggression and self-injury. The drug has been linked to deaths by suicide as well as heart attack. It can also dangerously raise body temperature and lead to kidney damage or kidney failure” (<https://www.drugabuse.gov>, Apr. 6, 2015).

Flakka is mainly produced in China and has been available via Internet purchase and home delivery. It became a controlled substance in China in September 2015. A single dose costs \$3-5, making the substance a very cheap high. Flakka takes its name from the Spanish slang term for a beautiful woman: “la flaca.”

- **Since January 2015, OSAM Network participants have reported on flakka.** •

## **June 2015**

Cincinnati participants reported high availability of flakka, noting increased availability of the drug during the previous six months, especially in rural areas. Participants reported that the drug produces hallucinations and added that it is often used with heroin to “speedball” (concurrent or consecutive use of stimulant and depressant drugs for a high and a low effect). One participant remarked, “A guy shot himself on it, so it seems dangerous.”

Media outlets alerted parents to the “new” synthetic drug, encouraging increased awareness of flakka, which at this time was believed to be not widespread in Ohio, but appearing in headlines ([www.wcpo.com](http://www.wcpo.com), April 20, 2015). Shortly thereafter, Lawrence County law enforcement arrested four individuals for multiple sales of alpha-PVP to a confidential informant ([www.otfcs.net/news](http://www.otfcs.net/news), May 13, 2015).



## **January 2016**

Cincinnati participants continued to report availability of flakka. However, participants reported: “It’s called ‘bath salts;’ It’s [alpha-PVP] under the umbrella of bath salts.” Another participant shared, “I used MDPV. Then last year it became illegal to produce MDPV in China, so I couldn’t get it anymore ... I switched to alpha-PVP which is very similar but cheaper.” When asked how available alpha-PVP is, a participant stated, “I get it off the Internet so it’s infinitely available ... ‘10’ (extremely available).” Participants reported that flakka is smoked, snorted or eaten, but most commonly snorted. Reportedly, flakka was also available in the Cleveland region where law enforcement reported high availability due to the ease of Internet purchase. Law enforcement reported typical users as 18-25 year olds. Media outlets reported on law enforcement seizures and arrests this reporting period related to flakka.

- Three individuals were arrested in South Point (Lawrence County) for trafficking alpha-PVP in what law enforcement called a “major drug bust;” 40 grams of flakka with an estimated street value of \$10,000 were seized along with 40 firearms and about \$20,000 in cash ([www.herald-dispatch.com](http://www.herald-dispatch.com), July 24, 2015).
- A media story referred to southern Ohio as perhaps the largest epicenter of flakka outside of Florida ([www.fusion.net](http://www.fusion.net), July 1, 2015). The article detailed several recent arrests for flakka in Ironton (Lawrence County): a woman was arrested while high on the substance and six individuals had been arrested for selling the drug. Police in Ironton related that they had received a lot of complaints about the sale of flakka.
- In an article entitled, *Portsmouth Police fighting growing deadly flakka epidemic*, four flakka overdoses were reported for Portsmouth (Scioto County) during a three-week period, one of which was fatal (<http://www.ohioemnews.com>, Sept. 16, 2015). Terrified customers and staff at a Portsmouth gas station called 911 to report a man stripping his clothes off and acting violently while high on flakka. EMS responded and the man died enroute to the hospital.

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