

Case Study

TruNarc Handheld Narcotics Analyzer Busts Drugs, Keeps Youth Safe at Buenos Aires Electronic Parties

Music brings young people together in groups everywhere in the world, gathering on beaches and in nightclubs, raves and festivals in the summer season to socialize and dance the night away at what are often today called electronic festivals or parties.

Unfortunately, electronic parties too often include an unseen and dangerous dance partner, i.e., a broad selection of illicit drugs, narcotics, and illegal synthetic substances provided by unscrupulous pushers. The beautiful Atlantic coast beaches of Buenos Aires, the Capital of Argentina, have seen their share of electronic parties, but also a growing drug abuse problem at these gatherings. In response, the Buenos Aires Police launched “Operation Sol (Sun),” an intensive enforcement effort designed to curtail the use of illicit drugs at these otherwise safe and fun parties for local youth.

To be effective, the police reasoned, officers would need to be at the parties when they were happening and be able to conduct “on the spot” detection and analysis of many different illegal substances in order to apprehend the dealers. For their high-tech ally in drug interdiction, the Operation Sol leaders chose to equip their officers with the Thermo Scientific™ TruNarc™ Handheld Narcotics Analyzer. The TruNarc Analyzer quickly identifies a wide range of illegal drugs including narcotics, synthetic drugs, cutting agents, and precursor materials. Analysis is performed in a single test, portable, hand-held, on the spot, in 30 seconds or less per sample. TruNarc is used worldwide by narcotics detectives, customs



agents, and law enforcement personnel for faster analysis of suspected illicit drugs. TruNarc provides non-destructive, non-contact sampling (laser driven) to preserve evidence, and is capable of identifying up to 247 prohibited substances, and is able to scan for more than 450 suspected controlled substances in a single, definitive test. This capability delivers a critical advantage especially in today's dangerous world of synthetic drugs of widely varying strength and toxicity such as Fentanyl.

De-Throning a King

In early 2019, a supplier of synthetic drugs known as the “King of Pills” was caught in Mar del Plata. He had become notorious for his ability to smuggle in narcotics to nighttime party venues along the Atlantic coast. At the time of the apprehension and capture of the ‘King’, Buenos Aires police, using TruNarc, were able to verify almost immediately that he had 250 doses of ecstasy in his possession; it was a major victory. During Operation Sol, the anti-drug detectives actually used two new Thermo Scientific portable analyzers, TruNarc and the Gemini™ Analyzer, together. Gemini is the world's first and only handheld integrated Raman and FTIR instrument.



Used in tandem, these instruments enabled the rapid identification of up to 247 classes of banned substances, 66 chemical precursors and another 78 drugs included in controlled sale medicines.



A quick TruNarc scan produces a 'fingerprint' of the substance being evaluated at the time. Gemini has a proprietary database that allows great precision in the verification of chemical substances. When used in combination, for example, one can determine immediately if a seized pill is part of the pharmaceutical legal industry or if it is an illegal drug.

The Buenos Aires authorities placed special emphasis in this year's Operation Sol on the circulation of synthetic drugs on beaches. Results were dramatic; at the first electronic party of the season in Mar del Plata, 146 attendees were detained, and the new devices enabled rapid identification of the substances.



"Since the beginning of our operation, we have realized that the incorporation of sophisticated technology for drug detection and analysis would be critical to our success; so, we therefore made all possible resources available to achieve this capability," said Cristian Ritondo, Minister of Security of Buenos Aires. He added that "As a result, during the first weeks of Operation Sol, an increase of more than 150% in the seizures of narcotic drugs was achieved."

Over the course of just four weeks in January of this year, the Buenos Aires police carried out Operation Sol at an ongoing electronic party held at the popular Club de Mar

Mute, just south of Mar del Plata. In each instance of enforcement, significant amounts of synthetic drugs were seized. In the most recent action, antidrug agents arrested two Venezuelans who were roaming the "rave" in possession of 76 ecstasy pills, 59 microdots of LSD, crystal ice (a type of methamphetamine), cocaine, and a significant amount of marijuana.

Synthetic Dangers

Synthetic drugs present an additional problem in the fight against drug trafficking because, unlike substances of plant origin (marijuana and cocaine), their components vary constantly and may be beyond the 'judicial scope'. For example, in Argentina, criminal prosecution can only occur if a discovered substance is included in the official list of prohibited drugs. Until recently, the synthetic drug known as 'Nbome 25' could not be prosecuted even though detectives knew of its circulation locally. With the recent update of the list of substances, it is now listed as an illegal drug and, consequently, anyone found in possession of a saleable amount of it can be prosecuted.

Recently, Nbome25 surfaced again at an electronic party in Buenos Aires. But at the same time another substance known as 2CE was found but was not on the official substance list and as a result those in possession could not be prosecuted at the time. For this reason, it's important to identify and be aware of all known drug derivatives, and each component of a synthetic substance must be determined if timely and appropriate actions are to be taken to legally interdict, identify, and classify them so as to get them off the streets. The wide-ranging scope, extreme precision, and virtually unlimited range of detection and analysis provided by the TruNarc and Gemini Analyzers are thus powerful, game-changing tools in the hands of law enforcement professionals. Understanding the scope of the problem of synthetic drugs is reflected in a statement by Colombian Héctor Hernando Bernal Contreras, advisor on drugs and chemical precursors for the UN. He stated, when he visited Argentina in 2016, that "New questions are raised (by synthetics) for Justice, because most of the substances are not on the controlled lists. In many cases, you have to help prosecutors understand what they are dealing with. For example, a small card can have 1,000 Nbome25 punches, and each dose only contains millionths of the substance; but in truth that card has a value greater than two kilos of cocaine."

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