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ECSTASY (MDMA) DRUG ABUSE AWARENESS – IT’S A SAFETY ISSUE

The role of safety training in the projection of military power is to protect lives and avoid injury thereby maintaining a fit and fighting force. The safe operation of equipment and performance of mission requires full mental awareness. Any prescription or over-the-counter medications that cause drowsiness or affect mental capabilities should be avoided when performing safety critical functions. Even more obvious is the total avoidance of illegal mind-altering substances and the immediate reporting of illegal drug use by others. Over the past 10 years, the Navy Safety Center recorded 27 fatalities and 39 injuries related to drug abuse. For all of the reasons cited above, the increased availability of the drug Ecstasy is of concern.

Ecstasy is a synthetic amphetamine drug close in chemical structure to methamphetamine. It is an illicit drug in the U.S. and currently has no accepted medical use in treatment in the U.S. Ecstasy is known by other street names as “E”, “X”, and “XTC.” It is referred to as a “club drug” because it is often sold or used at rave parties and nightclubs. It has the misperception of being a “safe drug” without the side effects of other rave drugs such as LSD, methamphetamine, heroin, or PCP. As Ecstasy abuse increased in the civilian community, so too has the medical awareness of the adverse effects of Ecstasy on brain function. Ecstasy is usually found in pill form, the size of an ordinary aspirin tablet, but may also be found in capsule form. As with many illicit drugs, there is an initial sense of euphoria, energy, and altered sensory perception. It must be remembered these “pleasurable” sensations come as a result of altered brain function and there is a down side associated with any drug use. Reports in the medical literature now highlight the adverse effects associated with Ecstasy abuse. Acute increases in body temperature and blood pressure are commonly associated with Ecstasy abuse. The increase in water loss and elevated body temperature requires the frequent drinking of water or other fluids. Sweating and drinking of large amounts of water can cause salt imbalance, fainting, and the need for immediate medical support. Ecstasy abuse, in association with strenuous activity or exercise, can result in muscle deterioration, known as rhabdomyolysis, salt imbalance, and kidney and liver damage. In addition, the effect of ecstasy on brain function adversely affects motor skills and attention. Frequent Ecstasy abuse is associated with mood alteration, depression, and memory deficits which persists several months after stopping use of the drug. A 1997 German medical publication cites at least 53 cases of medical complications associated with Ecstasy abuse, 14 of which were fatal. The report cites the medical effects of depression, panic disorders, behavioral disorders and depersonalization associated with long-term Ecstasy abuse. Short-term adverse effects of Ecstasy abuse include deterioration of motor skills and judgement, dehydration, high body temperature, and depression. The latter occurring three to five days post use. Similar reports are found in both U.S. and Canadian medical publications of emergency room cases, some with fatal or near fatal outcomes. Ecstasy pills are unreliable in purity and may commonly contain other additives such as caffeine, ephedrine, or other amphetamine compounds which adds to the complications for an adverse reaction.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the manufacture and distribution of medications within the U.S. The FDA ensures the quality and potency of the medication as well as the labeling of medications with appropriate warnings regarding its use. Why risk your health and safety using an illicit substance whose content in “backroom” production is speculative at best. At the personal level, avoiding Ecstasy is protecting your body from mind-altering substances that is capable of producing devastating acute effects and its consequences on normal brain function. At

the unit level, it is ensuring the safety of yourself and your shipmates. No one willingly gives safety into the hands of a mechanic or deck crewman whose performance is affected by drug use. Weaponry, navigation, propulsion, engineer -- each occupation is too important to be compromised by drug abuse. Safety is everyone's responsibility. It requires you to avoid drugs and report others who have abused or are abusing drugs -- it's a matter of personal and unit safety. Staying away from Ecstasy is a no-brainer when it comes down to safety.

There is a belief that the military does not test for Ecstasy or that Ecstasy can not be detected by the military drug testing program. Nothing can be further from the facts. The military has been testing for designer amphetamines since 1997. Specimens from every Navy and Marine Corps active duty and reserve personnel received in the drug testing laboratory are screened for the presence of designer amphetamines. Over 400 Navy and Marine Corps personnel were identified for Ecstasy abuse in Fiscal Year 2000. The Navy and Marine Corps both have a zero tolerance policy for drug abuse and it applies to Ecstasy abuse as well. Drug abuse is inconsistent with continued military service and an individual who decides to experiment with drugs does so at their risk for detection, punishment, and separation from military service under a bad conduct, dishonorable, or under other than honorable discharge. The risks associated with Ecstasy abuse are too great relative to your career, to your safety, and to readiness. If you are using drugs -- stop; if you know an individual who is abusing drugs -- report the individual. It is a matter of safety -- yours and your shipmates -- don't accept the risk. For further information on Ecstasy check the websites at <http://navdweb.spawar.navy.mil>.

DRAFT DRAFT

Don't Let Ecstasy Be Your Agony

By JO1 Joseph Gunder, Navy Wire Service

WASHINGTON (NWS) -- In the Navy, a lack of situational awareness can be deadly. Some over-the-counter medicines (cough medicines, painkillers) can decrease the edge military personnel need to tread the line between life and death. A drowsy hull technician working a metal press could have a finger or two crushed. A boatswain's mate on a ship's forecastle might not be paying attention to the color of the anchor chain paying out of the locker, or turn the friction brake in the wrong direction, with disastrous results.

You get the idea. If an over-the-counter medication could perhaps lead to these kinds of situations, image what a mind-altering substance like Ecstasy could lead to. It's has no accepted medicinal use for treatment in the United States. And it's illegal.

Ecstasy is a synthetic amphetamine drug, related chemically to the methamphetamine compounds. It's also known by the street names "E," "X," and "XTC." It is often referred to as a "club drug" because it has been sold at nightclubs and rave parties. It's misperceived as a "safe drug" without the side effects of other rave drugs such as LSD, methamphetamines, Heroin or PCP.

The Ecstasy drug comes in pill form, about the size of an aspirin, or may occur as a capsule or sold as a powder.

Immediate effects include a sense of euphoria, energy and altered sensory perception.

Then there are the side effects. Current medical literature lists depression, panic disorders as some of the long-term effects. Acute short-term effects include water loss from sweating, high body temperature and loss of motor skills and judgment.

But drinking large amounts of water isn't a solution to the water loss problem caused by Ecstasy use. A large intake of water to replace water loss from sweating and a higher body temperature can lead to a salt imbalance, and a trip to the emergency room.

This is awful lot of risk to one's health and safety for a drug "high." Why risk your health and safety to a drug that the Food and Drug Administration said has no medical treatment value in the U.S., especially one that was produced in someone's basement?

No one in the Navy would trust their lives to somebody who wasn't at 100 percent efficiency because of some party drug. Everyone's job is too important to be compromised by drug use. When it comes to safety, staying away from Ecstasy is a no-brainer.

And the military isn't just now catching up to the idea of its troops using Ecstasy. In fact, the military has been testing for "designer amphetamines" since 1997. Every sample that passes through the military testing laboratories gets screened for these

types of drugs. More than 400 Navy and Marine Corps personnel identified for Ecstasy use in FY00.

The Navy and Marine Corps has a "zero tolerance" policy for drug abuse, and that includes Ecstasy. Don't let it turn into agony. If you're doing it, stop. If someone else is doing it, report the individual. Don't risk detection, punishment, or discharge under dishonorable or other than honorable conditions.

But don't avoid it for those reasons, think of yourself and your shipmates. It's just a matter of safety ... their lives could be in your hands.