

“Legislative reform, the rescheduling of pseudoephedrine and the success of Project Stop have all made it more difficult for drug manufacturers to get their hands on the raw materials.”

Project Stop was a joint initiative between the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (Queensland Branch) and the Queensland Police Service. This initiative assists community pharmacists in making informed decisions as to the legitimate over-the-counter dispensing of cold and flu products which contain pseudoephedrine.

“The increasing use of MDMA, or ecstasy, right across the country is also of increasing concern,” Detective Superintendent Wilkins said.



“It used to be just in the dance club scene but now we are seeing a much broader usage pattern.

“It’s quite common for people to not associate the use or distribution of MDMA with criminality. They just see it as ‘giving a few pills’ to their mates, but it’s on the same scale

as distribution of amphetamines or heroin and attracts a maximum sentence of 25 years imprisonment for trafficking,” he said.

## Coppers alerted to theft of copper

The theft and sale of non-ferrous metals—in particular, copper—has been identified as an emerging trend, not only in Australia but world wide. The trend is said to be linked to increasing demand for non-ferrous metals and significant price rises.

Earlier this year police received information from a large Brisbane-based building company that an employee responsible for supervising plumbing projects throughout South East Queensland appeared to be using company order books to purchase copper.

This particular company does not ordinarily use copper pipe for plumbing, instead opting for the cheaper and easier to use plastic poly pipe.

The Property Crime Investigation Unit (PCIU) was called in to investigate. The PCIU is a dedicated team of detectives who focus on crime involving break

and enter of premises and repeat offenders. The unit also focuses on emerging crime trends.

PCIU detectives directed a full audit of the company’s order books with reconciliation of the purchases to the associated job numbers. It was quickly established the suspect had conducted a large number of transactions over a fifteen month period from January 2007.

Inquiries made with suppliers and scrap metal dealers provided the quantities and descriptions of the copper and details of each individual transaction. The material stolen totalled approximately 35 tonnes.

A search warrant was executed at the suspect’s home and a large quantity of plumbing-related equipment such as gas hot water systems and tap ware was recovered, along with power tools. All of this property had been

bought on the company account and was slowly being sold by the suspect through a series of garage sales.

The estimated loss to the company was approximately \$1.1 million in wholesale value of the copper.

Once word of these offences travelled throughout the building industry numerous calls were received at the PCIU seeking advice on the way to conduct business of this nature. In response the Unit commenced Operation Condor.

An initial focus was to regulate the dealers throughout the state to bring them in line with licensing and reporting procedures in accordance with the *Second Hand Dealers and Pawnbrokers Act*.

With cooperation of police regions throughout the state this has now largely been achieved. Receipts for transactions of this type are

collected and the details are entered onto the Stolen Property Investigation and Recovery System (SPIRS) database administered by the PCIU. The SPIRS database provides an investigative tool and allows police to target frequent sellers of copper and other non-ferrous metals on a local level.

Another initial challenge faced in implementing this operation was standardising the descriptions of stolen property. An awareness program has been conducted which has led to valuable partnerships and a free flow of information between dealers and detectives.

Operation Condor has led to changes throughout the industry which makes offences of this scale unlikely to occur again.

*By Detective Senior Constable Emma MacCallum, Property Crime Investigation Unit*