



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, D.C. 20503

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Directive Dir. No. 2025-005

**TO: EVOLVING AND EMERGING THREATS COMMITTEE MEMBERS,
ONDCP COMPONENT HEADS AND STAFF**

**FROM: JON RICE, SENIOR OFFICIAL PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF THE
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY**

**SUBJECT: UPDATED CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATING EVOLVING AND EMERGING
DRUG THREATS – 2025**

PURPOSE:

This directive updates the criteria and procedures that the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) will use in designating and terminating the designations of emerging and continuing drug threats. The directive fulfills ONDCP's statutory duty to promulgate and publicize standards for making and terminating emerging drug threat designations.

AUTHORITY:

The Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment (SUPPORT) for Patients and Communities Act of 2018, 21 U.S.C. § 1708.

RESCISSION:

This directive cancels all prior ONDCP directives, memorandums, standard operating procedures, and written instructions for designating emerging and continuing drug threats.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

The Emerging and Continuing Threats Coordinator (Emerging Threats Coordinator), the Evolving and Emerging Threats Committee (Emerging Threats Committee) and the Office of Translational Research (OTR) are primarily responsible for carrying out work related to the evolving and emerging threats portfolio. The ONDCP Director is ultimately responsible for making evolving and emerging drug threat designations and terminating such designations after consultation with relevant parties, such as the Emerging Threats Committee, the Emerging Threats Coordinator, the Assistant Director for OTR, other ONDCP staff and the heads of relevant national drug control program agencies.

LEGISLATIVE INTENT:

Through enacting 21 U.S.C. § 1708, Congress codified its intention for the Federal government to closely monitor evolving and emerging drug threats and to act early in the development of a national threat to prevent such threats from reaching levels seen during the opioid crisis. In particular, the SUPPORT Act required ONDCP to promulgate standards for designating an evolving or emerging drug threat and terminating such a designation (21 U.S.C. § 1708(c)). The SUPPORT Act required ONDCP to establish the Emerging Threats Committee consisting of



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representatives from National Drug Control Program Agencies and other agencies, representatives from State, local and Tribal governments, and representatives from other entities designated by the ONDCP Director (21 U.S.C. § 1708(b)). The Emerging Threats Committee is responsible for advising ONDCP on decisions to designate and terminate the designation of evolving and emerging drug threats. *See* 21 U.S.C. § 1708(b)(6).

Since the adoption of the criteria for designating emerging and continuing drug threats promulgated in ONDCP Directive 2022-002, ONDCP has continued to review how well the criteria perform in identifying evolving and emerging drug threats. In an effort to improve the identification of emerging drug threats in the U.S., ONDCP has refined the initial criteria and established an *Emerging Drug Threats Framework*. The updated criteria outlined in this directive utilize timelier and more relevant data, and the Framework facilitates the tracking and categorizing of the established criteria. The updated criteria and the Framework will enable ONDCP and the Evolving and Emerging Threats Committee to have greater precision in monitoring and identifying emerging drug threats in the United States.

GUIDANCE ON THE APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA:

It should be emphasized that although the criteria will be used to guide ONDCP in making designations of evolving and emerging threats under the SUPPORT Act, the designations are not automatic. Instead, a substance – or a change in a pattern of substance use – is identified by the criteria described below for further consideration by the ONDCP Director. The Director maintains the final decision-making authority on what substance or patterns of use to designate as an evolving or emerging threat and when to make a designation.

METRICS FOR THE FRAMEWORK AND CRITERIA:

ONDCP will use standard metrics that reference increased or decreased rates of public health or public safety measures as the basis of the criteria to determine what might be considered by the ONDCP Director as an evolving or emerging threat.

ONDCP will review for designation any substance or patterns of substance use by individuals, cohorts, or specific groups of populations that nationally *increase* in a 12-month period by at least 15 percent with respect to the criteria below in at least three of the four census regions. Although variation from year to year is to be expected, an increase at the 15 percent level, and a presence in at least three census regions, is a signal sufficient to trigger further review.

Conversely, a decrease of at least 15 percent with respect to the criteria below in at least three of the four census regions would trigger agency review of whether a previously issued emerging or evolving drug threat designation should be terminated. Such determinations would be made when the ONDCP Director decides that an emerging drug threat is no longer a major threat to public health. Note that datasets vary in their timeliness and that ONDCP will rely on the most up to date data available in making decisions.



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The updated criteria for designating or terminating the designation of emerging drug threats are listed below:

Criteria to Inform Designating Emerging Drug Threats

- Criterion 1:** *An increase in mortality due to drug overdose involving a single or combination of psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 2:** *An increase in seizures involving a single or combination of psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 3:** *An increase in consumption of psychoactive substances or substance use disorders.*
- Criterion 4:** *An increase in EMS patient encounters, emergency department visits, or hospitalizations involving psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 5:** *An increase in reporting by public safety or public health organizations of clinical illnesses related to suspected or known exposure to psychoactive substances.*

Criteria to Inform Terminating Emerging Drug Threat Designations

- Criterion 1:** *A decrease (or other improvement) in mortality due to drug overdose involving a single or combination of psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 2:** *A decrease (or other improvement) in seizures involving a single or combination of psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 3:** *A decrease (or other improvement) in consumption of psychoactive substances or substance use disorders.*
- Criterion 4:** *A decrease (or other improvement) in EMS patient encounters, emergency department visits, or hospitalizations involving psychoactive substances.*
- Criterion 5:** *A decrease (or otherwise improvement) in reporting by public safety or public health organizations of clinical illnesses related to suspected or known exposure to psychoactive substances.*

ONDCP believes the rate of increases and the broad geographical distribution of such increases are important considerations. Therefore, in addition to establishing emerging drug threats metrics, **ONDCP developed a *Drug Threat Framework to track, categorize, and closely monitor substances as they emerge and become a national threat.*** The Framework categorizes the severity of a substance's threat in one of nine categories using the degree of increase and the geographic spread:

The first criterion classifies annual increases:

- *Drug of Interest:* an increase of 5-9.99 percent
- *Drug of Concern:* an increase of 10-14.99 percent
- *Drug Threat:* an increase of 15 percent or more

The second criterion classifies geographic spread:



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- *Isolated*: found in one census region
- *Regional*: found in two census regions
- *Emerging*: found in three or more census regions

This twofold approach creates nine categories which help ONDCP focus on the most immediate and dangerous threats (Appendix A). In addition, and when applicable, a minimum threshold is instituted to exclude substances that are not considered a significant threat when applying the Framework. Substances with a minimum of 10 reports are listed in the *Isolated* category. Substances with a minimum of 50 reports are reported in the *Regional* category. Substances with a minimum of 100 reports are reported in the *Emerging* category. The minimum thresholds ensure that geographic spread is captured as psychoactive substances begin to appear in the U.S. while at the same time reducing the frequency of extreme percentage increases for low count substances.

Meeting one or all of the criteria would put a substance or a pattern of substance use on an “eligible list” for further monitoring and for consideration for designation by the ONDCP Director. Other potential factors that ONDCP will take into consideration when making the designation include: the magnitude of an increase or decrease, weighing the costs and benefits of implementing plans to address the emerging threat, the threat’s potential for spreading quickly, and the substance’s potential for harm. All of these considerations, together with a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the criteria, will be considered by the Emerging Threats Committee, the Emerging Threats Coordinator and ultimately the Director, prior to making an emerging threat designation.

PUBLIC STATEMENT

ONDCP must upload a public statement on ONDCP’s website explaining the designation of an emerging drug threat or the termination of such designation and must notify the appropriate congressional committees of the availability of such statement when a designation or termination of the designation has been made.

EMERGING THREAT RESPONSE PLAN

Upon making an emerging threat designation under 21 U.S.C. § 1708(c), ONDCP must publish and make publicly available an Emerging Threat Response Plan in accordance with the requirements of 21 U.S.C. § 1708(d).

EVALUATION OF MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Upon designation of an emerging threat under 21 U.S.C. § 1708(c), the ONDCP Director must evaluate whether a media campaign would be feasible and appropriate to address the threat. If the Director determines that a media campaign is appropriate, the Director will conduct a national anti-drug media campaign in accordance with the requirements of 21 U.S.C. § 1708(f), if funding is made available for this purpose.

POINT OF CONTACT

The ONDCP point of contact for all matters referenced in this Directive is:

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APPENDIX:
A: Emerging Drug Threats Framework

