



AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2023**



Best Public Information Campaign



Pictured is Nicki Killeen, HSE Project Manager, Emerging Drug Trends, Sinead McNamara, Senior Biochemist, HSE National Drug Treatment Centre and Frank Feighan, Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy at the launch of the first drug monitoring programme to analyse drugs to provide real time information at a festival setting on August 18th 2022.



Organisation

HSE Communications

Campaign

Safer Nightlife & Festivals – HSE Pilot Drug Monitoring & Information Programme

Description of Campaign

In a ground-breaking and progressive move, the HSE ran a pilot drug monitoring programme in Ireland in the Summer of 2022. This first of its kind in Ireland service aimed to:

- Protect the health of people attending festivals/nightlife settings
- Reduce drug-related harm by identifying emerging drug trends to
- Influencing people's behaviour through education and interventions
- Assist with medical interventions.

This programme saw the HSE provide surrender bins for people who use drugs at events and festivals, and real-time laboratory testing of substances surrendered. The HSE could then provide immediate alerts, through social media and news media, to people at the event where high-risk substances were detected.

The programme was launched on August 18th 2022 by the HSE, in partnership with the Department of Health, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. This approach is in line with the National Drug Strategy and the current Programme for Government.

This pilot programme happened at Electric Picnic 2022 and was implemented as part of the wider HSE 'Safer Nightlife' multi component harm reduction campaign, launched on 25th May 2022. And, while it's safer not to use drugs, the reality is that some people do and this overall HSE drugs.ie harm reduction campaign aims to better inform, users, reduce harm and ultimately SAVING lives.

Background to the Campaign

Against a backdrop of new psychoactive substances and reports of high potency substances across Europe posing a threat to health, the HSE approached the 2022 festival season.

After an extended period of planning and consultation on May 25th 2022, the HSE launched the first 'drug harm reduction campaign for festival season', aimed at people attending Irish music festivals. This involved coordinating a volunteer programme to deliver outreach at 3 festivals (Life, Indie and Electric Picnic).

This new campaign also outlined proposals to undertake an innovative onsite pilot drug monitoring programme to gain access to real-time information on potentially harmful substances while also raising awareness of current risks and encouraging people to reduce the risks associated with drug use.

With EP2022 chosen as the site for this pilot drug monitoring programme, the HSE planned to gain 'real-time' knowledge on current drug market trends so they could improve harm reduction specific to festival/nightlife settings while providing ground-breaking warnings to festival goers.

In total 3 warnings were issued over the 3 day event to notify the public of dangerously potent MDMA pills and powders and the emergence of a new drug '3-CMC'. In total, 4 new drugs never found before in Ireland were detected at this event and later communicated through the publication of a report.

This work also included having teams of trained volunteers to talk about drug trends and harm-reduction practices with attendees at EP2022 and the other two festivals while also supporting people in cases of drug emergencies.

This innovative and evidence based drug harm reduction campaign also saw the creation of new festival education booklet, key messages (see below), resources, social media imagery and a poster series, which provided people who use drugs with information about drug emergencies and practical steps to reduce the harms.

Key messages included:

- **Tell your friends if you decide to use drugs at the festival**
- **Be in the know before you go**
- **Plan to take less**
- **Start low and go slow**
- **Leave the mixing to the DJ**
- **Keep cool and stay hydrated**
- **Medics are your mates.**

Statement of Objectives

This pilot programme marked a significant milestone in Irish drug policy developments and was the first of its kind in Ireland. As a result of being onsite at a festival setting, the HSE was able to quickly test, monitor and share accurate

drug and substance information with the public to encourage harm reduction discussions both in person online and via the media over the course of the festival weekend.

Objectives for this campaign were:

- Launch a pilot drug checking programme at festival setting to monitor drug trends in a real-time setting
- Reach a high volume of young festival attendees using clear, relatable language and messaging
- Issue 'real-time' risk communications to festival goers on dangerous substances
- Utilise new channels and methods of awareness-raising for this target group
- Increase engagement with festival-goers and steer the target groups to @drugsdotie for HSE harm reduction information
- Enhance the HSE's drugs.ie reputation as the go-to source of harm reduction information amongst festival goers, key industry influencers, external stakeholders e.g. An Garda Síochána, media
- Build relationships with key external stakeholders including An Garda Síochána, the media and key industry influencers and continue the conversation after the festival
- Reduce harm and SAVE lives

Programme Planning and Strategy

In the HSE led 'Report of the Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking Working Group 2021', key findings outlined how most interest was expressed for drug checking for those attending a festival setting. The report identified that participants would discard substances in amnesty bins at events for the purpose of drug monitoring and risk communication purposes to notify if dangers drugs were in circulation.

In preparation for the 2022 festival season, following its shut down due to COVID-19, the drugs.ie working group convened with these recommendations and key findings of the 'Report of Emerging Drug Trends and Drug Checking' group to the fore.

Led by Prof Eamon Keenan, HSE Clinical Lead, Addiction Services, the new festival drug harm reduction campaign for festival/nightlife settings was launched on May 25th 2022, and included an innovative pilot drug monitoring programme during this year's festival seasons.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expert voices in their field were Prof Keenan and Nicki Killeen• Clear and defined information available on drugs.ie• Innovative messaging• Excellent working relationship with the national media• Drugsdot.ie, HSE social media channels established as a trusted source of information for people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• External stakeholders e.g. the Department of Health, Department of Tourism, An Garda Síochána, Electric Picnic• Topic content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pushing an open door due to the topic matter• Significant media interest in this topic• Target audience open to receiving this type of 'real-time' communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The involvement high profile third parties including festival organisers/ settings• Implications for legal and policy stakeholders such as Department of Justice/An Garda Síochána• Social media challenges and misinformation circulating through social media channels and media

Targeted audience and location

This 'real-time' campaign was aimed at people attending Irish music festivals offering them warnings on potentially lethal substances and allowing them an opportunity to see practical and accurate drug harm reduction information and advice associated with drug use.

On 18th August, #EP2022 was announced as the location of this innovative piece of work where substances submitted to the surrender bins by festival attendees would subsequently become the possession of the onsite HSE lab where they were tested for health analysis purposes.

Objective/Goal	Actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch a pilot drug checking programme at festival setting to monitor drug trends in a 'real-time' setting 	<p>Photocall held on 18th August in a nightclub setting</p> <p>Key media invited</p> <p>Press release & photography issued</p> <p>Proactive media outreach undertaken</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach a high volume of young festival attendees using clear, relatable language and messaging 	<p>Three clearly identifiable warnings or caution messages issued on festival screens and on @HSELive social media channels over festival weekend</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue 'real-time' risk communications to festival goers on dangerous substances 	<p>A warning template created and issued along with photos of the harmful drugs in 'real-time'</p> <p>Images shared on @drugsdotie social media channels and @HSELive channels</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilise new channels/methods of awareness-raising for this target 	<p>Festival screens flashed up warnings between gigs and also through EP social media channels over the festival weekend.</p> <p>Risk Communications issued through a push notification on the EP festival app</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase engagement with festival-goers and steer the target group(s) to @drugsdotie for HSE harm reduction information 	<p>@Drugsdotie and @HSE social media channels fully utilised over the weekend of #EP2022</p> <p>650,000 people reach through HSE Ireland's social media channels over the #EP2022 weekend</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance HSE/drugs.ie reputation as the go-to source of harm reduction information amongst festival goers, key industry influencers, external stakeholders e.g. An Garda Síochána, media 	<p>Key interviews, proactive media outreach on Friday, 1st September at #EP2022</p> <p>Key media shared our messages on EP, national media digital channels and other external stakeholders over #EP2022 weekend</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish/build relationships with key external stakeholders including An Garda Síochána, the media and key industry influencers 	<p>Sign off received from Departments of Health & Tourism and An Garda Síochána for this innovative project.</p> <p>We encountered several significant challenges in the run up to the event including media interest regarding An Garda Síochána's response to 'back of house' drug monitoring.</p> <p>We met with AGS on-site and quickly established clear and concise messaging/HSE response(s) to avoid undermining this pilot programme.</p>

A multi component/pronged approach was adopted by both the HSE Press and Digital/Social team.

- Proactive Media Outreach**

A careful crafted media outreach plan was devised to include photo opportunities, press release(s), targeted

pitching of key HSE spokespersons for long lead features/broadcast pieces on national media and in key industry publications. This was supported by our excellent working relationships with key journalists such as Cormac

O'Keeffe, Irish Examiner and placing proactive key interviews e.g. Ryan Tubridy and Jennifer Zamparelli in August 2022.

Campaign resources (festival related branded collateral such as water bottles, lip balm) were also sent to influencers earlier in the summer to raise awareness in anticipation of the launch of this pilot programme and contained the campaign messages.

In forward planning for this significant event, we knew that key media/journalists were onsite at EP. We issued a media advisory on Friday, 1st September to utilise this opportunity, giving the media exclusive access to our spokesperson, Prof Eamon Keenan to discuss this landmark programme.

An update was also shared on drugs.ie website as well as being amplified on our social media channels to create a positive reaction to this ground breaking pilot project.

- **Programme Launch**

A launch event was organised by HSE Press on 18th August to announce the 'back of house' drug testing at Electric Picnic where we handpicked media and photographers to attend the event for interview and coverage. Press release was issued with photos which included Minister for State, Frank Feighan, TD, EP Festival Director Melvin Benn, Prof Eamon Keenan, Senior Biochemists from the HSE National Drug Treatment Centre Laboratory Services demonstrated how the drug testing would happen at EP.

We secured TV interviews and coverage on TV and Radio news, featured in radio conversation/commentary on this topic. Photographs of key pieces of equipment e.g. surrender bins, drug testing equipment were used widely in their coverage.

We also amplified key media coverage across multiple HSE social media platforms to further enhance our reach while the media did similar across their own digital channels.

- **Social Media/Digital First Approach**

We created a new website page www.drugs.ie/festivals to share key milestones and updates in the run up to the festival weekend.

With advance agreement with festival organisers, a system where the drugs.ie team alerted festival goers about potentially dangerous substances was developed. This information was shared to a wider audience at EP on its big screens, as push notifications on EP app, and through the @drugsdotie, @HSELive and also EP social media channels. HSE branding was also to the fore to ensure people know its information they can trust.

Messages also had to be simple so those under the influence would understand the warnings. A system was set up where images were updated and approved before being sent to the #EP2022 team for sharing.

Three warnings were issued over the #EP2022 weekend. These messages were shared on the festival's Main Stage big screen, on their social media platforms and issued through a push notification on the EP app. A significant number of media outlets also carried our risk communications.

In conclusion, the campaign closed with the successful launch of its evaluation report on October 25th 2022. This generated much media coverage and showed that ***the pilot achieved its key objective of identify emerging drug trends with an aim of reducing drug related harm and protecting the health of people attending the event.***

Also following this pilot, a *Working Group* has been established to oversee health and safety responses in nightlife settings. The HSE continues to work with stakeholders and policy makers to expand this harm reduction programme.

Measurement

Emerging Drug Trends

On-site drug testing results showed a worrying level of identified substances, drugs were stronger than users thought and 'never detected before' substances.

Buy in from attendees in using surrender bins, the testing and awareness of results helped to reduce the harm to festival goers by informing them of the dangers of these drugs.

Results:

- 46 samples submitted
- Drug content identified in 42 samples
- 4 samples remain unconfirmed
- 19 MDMA samples submitted (8 powders and 11 pills)
- 5 MDMA powders tested as almost pure MDMA
- Ecstasy pills ranged from 36mg to 235mg of MDMA
- 12 novel substances submitted- 7 tabs, 4 powders/crystals and 1 tablet
- 3 new psychoactive substances identified not previously detected in Ireland
- 3 risk communications issued on high strength MDMA and the emergence of 3-CMC in white crystals

Press Activity/Coverage Sentiment

Key measurements

- 2 press releases
- 1 launch
- 2 media advisories
- 10 interviews
- 207 media clippings
- 2 Editorials (links below)
 - * **RTE.ie** - to date 8,082 page views with noteworthy stat, average dwell time of 3m 48s, which is evidence of strong engagement.
 - * **Irish Examiner**

Positive sentiment created improved brand awareness for drugs.ie, driving the conversation at #EP2022 around the importance of knowing what you are taking, if you chose to take drugs.

Social Media reach and website engagement:

- @Drugdotie received 550k impressions on posts over #EP2022 weekend
- Following HSE's first warning on purple 'Mybrand' skull, 320k impressions were achieved
- @HSELive gained 120k impressions with 97k associated with Friday night's caution
- Reach of 100k across HSE Instagram platform and over 435k on Facebook
- Irish profiles and journalists circulated risk communication messages on social media channels (see appendices)
- September was hugely successful for Drugs.ie on social media platforms with @drugdotie alone receiving 161k profile visits over relatively short period of time while also gaining 545 new followers
- Between August 31st – September 4th, Drugs.ie received engagement from 18,562 users including 3,821 people accessing drugs.ie/drug_monitoring which contained the risk communication messages issued at #EP2022 and 2,145 people accessed drugs.ie/festivals

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