



ILLEGAL PILL PRESSES: AN OVERLOOKED THREAT TO AMERICAN PATIENTS

**A JOINT PROJECT BY:
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BOARDS OF PHARMACY,
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DRUG DIVERSION
INVESTIGATORS AND
THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SAFE MEDICINES**

RELEASED MARCH 19, 2019.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For less than \$500, an individual with ill intent can purchase a pill press and a counterfeit pill mold that allows them to turn cheap, readily available, unregulated ingredients into a six-figure profit. Criminals rely upon these pill presses to create dangerous counterfeit medications with toxic substances such as cheaply imported fentanyl (analogues). Their deadly homemade products have reached 46 states in the United States. Of grave concern is the significant lack of manufacturing control utilized in the making of these counterfeit products.

The inexperience of these “garage manufacturers” has killed unsuspecting Americans in 30 states.

Counterfeit medications that can kill someone with a single pill are a reality that is increasing at an alarming rate. This is a critical health issue that all three of our organizations are urgently striving to stay on top of.

How do these criminals get their hands on pill presses? How are they evading customs inspections? Is possession of these presses illegal and if so, why are more people not charged with it?

Recently, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy, National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators and The Partnership for Safe Medicines joined together to research the extent of the pill press challenge for law enforcement and other first responders. Key findings include:

- 1. Pill presses are broadly available for sale on the Internet and virtually untracked.** These devices are successfully smuggled through customs because the enormous volume of packages makes compliance challenging. Data from Customs and Border Protection shows pill press seizures at International Mail Facilities are increasing every year, growing 19 fold from 2011 to 2017.
- 2. The broad availability and sale of pill presses allow novice criminals to make millions of doses** of nearly perfect-looking counterfeits that can have deadly consequences.
- 3. Possession of a pill press, while not well regulated, is at most a violation of a Drug Enforcement Administration registration requirement carrying no jail time.** It only becomes a crime once you add a counterfeit pill mold. However, the prosecution of individuals for possession of a pill press with a counterfeit pill mold is also a rare occurrence and does not carry a sentence high enough to be a deterrent.
- 4. Disrupting the availability of pill presses will be a challenging process.** Our research suggests that increasing criminal penalties for the possession or non-registration of a pill press alone is not likely to provide a sufficient deterrent because it relies on a change in charging behavior by prosecutors. Note: Some law enforcement interviewed suggested adding a sentencing enhancement that increases penalties for committing a drug-related crime with a pill press and suggested exploring serialization or registration as a technique to increase the frequency of indictments for illegal possession and manufacturing operations.

Read the full report here: <https://safedr.org/pill-press-threat>.

Media contact: media@safemedicines.org