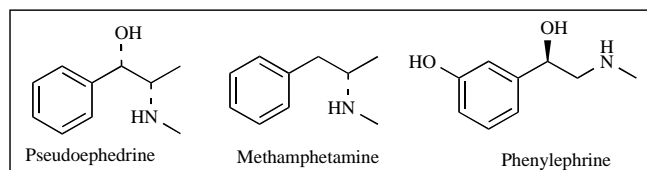


## Molecule of the Month

**An Illicit Reduction.** The passage of the Combat Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005 and the declaration of November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006 as “National Methamphetamine Awareness Day” by the US Drug Enforcement Administration represent a bit more public attention than usual for a Schedule II sympathomimetic amine approved in the US for the treatment of narcolepsy and attention deficit disorder. Even pseudoephedrine, a decongestant marketed as an ingredient in hundreds of over-the-counter medications and the chemical precursor of choice for the illicit production of methamphetamine, has found itself replaced in a number of cold medicine formulations with the less synthetically

succeeded in severely damaging domestic production. The National Drug Threat Assessment of 2007 reports superlab seizures (labs capable of producing 10 lbs./batch) are down from 244 in 2001 to only 35 in 2005, yet the frequency of misuse (38.8% of state/local law enforcement report methamphetamine as the greatest drug threat) remains alarmingly high. Importation from Mexican labs has been steadily increasing, with seized Mexican methamphetamine rising from 2706 lbs. in 2003 to 4346 lbs. in 2005.<sup>2</sup> With covert US production smarting and importation on the rise it seems legislative efforts to curb methamphetamine availability have changed the nature of the “war on meth” to parallel that of another stimulant, cocaine.



exploitable (and perhaps less efficacious) phenylephrine.<sup>1</sup> A brief perusal of the Internet reveals numerous sites espousing practical modes of manufacture of methamphetamine from pseudoephedrine, most with the detail of an *Organic Syntheses* preparation complete with discussions of absolute vs. relative configuration. Commonly described routes include the “red, white, and blue protocol” (red phosphorus, white pseudoephedrine, and blue iodine) and the Birch reduction, wherein rechargeable batteries appear to be the preferred source of metallic lithium. This ease of synthesis and availability of starting materials had previously ensured illicit American-made methamphetamine could meet demand, but recent restrictions on pseudoephedrine have

### REFERENCES

- [1] Hendeles, L., Hatton, R.C. *J. Allergy Clin. Immunol.* **2006**, Vol 118(1), p. 279.
- [2] National Drug Threat Assessment 2007, compiled by the US Department of Justice. Available at [www.usdoj.gov/ndic](http://www.usdoj.gov/ndic).

**J. Brad Shotwell**

GlaxoSmithKline, R&D  
3.4184-4B  
5 Moore Drive  
Research Triangle Park,  
NC 27709  
USA  
Tel: (919) 483-3918  
Fax: (919) 483-6053  
E-mail: [John.B.Shotwell@GSK.com](mailto:John.B.Shotwell@GSK.com)