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The ENTHEOGENS
& DRUG POLICY
PROJECT

Salvia Divinorum & Cognitive Liberty Frequently Asked Questions

(last updated 20 February 2003)

BACKGROUND

1. What is *Salvia divinorum*?

Salvia divinorum (a.k.a. Diviner's Sage, Seer's Sage, Hojas de la Pastora, or Ska Maria Pastora) is a psychoactive plant native to the eastern Sierra Madre in Mexico. A member of the mint family, *Salvia* is used by the Mazatec Indians of that region for its medicinal and vision-inducing properties. Preliminary scientific investigation of **Salvinorin A**, the plant's active principle, suggests a unique chemical structure and great therapeutic potential. *Salvia* was first introduced to the United States in 1962 and remained virtually unknown until a recent article in the *New York Times* created public interest in the plant as a legal hallucinogen.

2. Why is *Salvia* an Issue for the CCLE?

- The Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics believes that people have a **fundamental right** to access the full spectrum of cognition, to engage in multiple modalities of thought, and to occasion alternative states consciousness. Because *Salvia divinorum* is both legal in the US and visionary, some law-abiding people have relied upon it to occasion profound **alternative states of consciousness** without fear of incarceration.
- On October 10, 2002, federal legislation (HR 5607) was introduced to make *Salvia* and its active principle, Salvinorin A, schedule I drugs under the federal Controlled Substances Act. Although HR 5607 died in committee last year ([see HR 5607 archive](#)), Congressman Joe Baca (D-CA), the bill's sponsor, has vowed to reintroduce it this year. Schedule I is reserved for dangerous drugs that pose great risks to public safety. The CCLE opposes the **inappropriate scheduling** of *Salvia* as an unwarranted extension of the War on Drugs.

3. What is the Salvia Divinorum Defense Fund?

The [Salvia Divinorum Defense Fund](#) was established with **tax-deductible contributions** to help CCLE educate policy makers and the public about *Salvia divinorum* and advocate against its scheduling under the Controlled Substances Act. To date publication of a CCLE [informative report on Salvia](#), filing of a

[Freedom of Information Act Request](#) seeking DEA information about the plant, coordination of a broad based coalition of organizations, experts, and activists who oppose scheduling, and monitoring and reporting on legislative activity concerning the plant have all been made possible by the fund. You can learn more about CCLE's work on *Salvia* and even make a donation to the Salvia Divinorum Defense Fund by visiting the [Salvia Divinorum Action Center](#) on our website.

SCHEDULING

4. Why would inclusion of *Salvia divinorum* and Salvinorin A in Schedule I be inappropriate?

Schedule I is typically reserved for dangerous drugs that have a high potential for abuse and no current medical use. The placement of *Salvia* in schedule I cannot be scientifically justified.

- **Salvia does not have a high potential for abuse.** *Salvia* remains relatively unknown and is not widely used. Reports of *Salvia* experiences tend to emphasize the plant's potentially disturbing psychoactive effects, making it unattractive as a recreational drug. No *Salvia* poisonings or related emergency room visits have been reported. The plant's effects are short acting and lack any known toxicity or health risks.
- **Salvia has tremendous medical potential and can be safely used under medical supervision.** *Salvia* has a long history of medical use in the folk tradition of the Mazatec Indians for relief from anemia, headache, and rheumatism. An article in the *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* reported its recent successful use in treating a patient's chronic depression. Current scientific research, supported by ethno-botanical data, suggests that Salvinorin A holds promising therapeutic potential in the fields of psychopharmacology, psychiatry, and herbal medicine.
- **Schedule I classification would make scientific research on Salvia virtually impossible.** Once a plant is placed in Schedule I, scientific research with the plant becomes next to impossible. One need only look at the situation with respect to *Cannabis* and medical marijuana to see how federal "drug war" politics makes even medicinal use of, and research on, a Schedule I plant very difficult. Given that scientists are just beginning to find promising medical uses for *Salvia divinorum*, placement of the plant in Schedule I threatens to forestall the development of new and effective medical treatments.

CURRENT USE PATTERNS

5. How is Salvia used?

Salvia is generally acknowledged as a difficult drug to use. The leaves are **either chewed or smoked**. The intense bitterness of the leaves makes oral ingestion unpleasant while smoking them requires the rapid inhalation of large volumes of smoke.

6. What do the effects of Salvia feel like?

Salvia's psychoactive effects are **inconsistent and short-lived**. Even the isolated chemical produces brief effects in humans. Few people consider the effects pleasurable, and most people choose not to repeat the experience after one exposure. Many describe the appearance of geometric shapes in their field of vision, while at higher doses, brief "out of body experiences" or visionary states may be produced.

7. Is it true that some people use Salvia spiritually or religiously?

Some drugs and visionary plants can help users attain mystical states of consciousness. Some people take *Salvia* with the intent of having a spiritual or religious experience and claim to be able to achieve one from it. It is used this way, for example, by the Indians of the Sierra Mazatec, in Mexico.

8. Isn't Salvia use prevalent in the youth culture and visible at raves?

Contrary to claims made by parties seeking to schedule *Salvia*, it is **not the "new ecstasy."** Reports of widespread *Salvia* use at raves have yet to be substantiated. The fact that *Salvia* is difficult to use and does not generally produce fun or pleasurable effects makes the popular recreational use of *Salvia* highly unlikely.

PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

9. Aren't hallucinogens inherently dangerous?

Any psychoactive substance can be potentially dangerous if it is used irresponsibly. There are no known medical complications, poisonings, deaths, or cases of dependency associated with *Salvia*. Any danger from the use of *Salvia* would most likely arise from **anxiety reactions** experienced by the user or the possibility of accidents occurring while users try to walk or engage in other activities while visually impaired. Anxiety reactions are generally self-limiting due to the brief duration of the effects and respond to quiet reassurance. Additionally, extraneous noise or even opening the eyes may completely terminate the plant's short-lived effects.

10. Congressman Baca alleges that Salvia caused a teenager to stab someone, is this true?

There is one known case involving a minor who claims to have smoked *Salvia*, become disoriented, and stabbed another person who was selling him marijuana. The stabbing was **not fatal**. Because the case involves a minor, the record including the arrest report is sealed and it is very difficult to clearly determine the exact details of the event and what role *Salvia* may have played in it. We do know that the minor raised *Salvia* intoxication as a defense to the stabbing charges and that the judge reviewing the evidence **rejected that defense**.

REGULATION VERSUS PROHIBITION

11. Won't children have access to Salvia if it is not scheduled the way Congressman Baca proposes?

- Outlawing *Salvia* is not as simple a solution as it may seem. Prohibiting a substance often makes it more attractive (a result known as the **forbidden fruit** effect)

and creates a black market for it, which, ironically, makes it **easier to obtain** for minors. It has been reported for example that minors have easier access to marijuana than beer, because access to alcohol is better controlled.

- **Blanket prohibition** would keep responsible adults who have been using *Salvia* without incident and legitimate scientific researchers from having access to the plant as well.
- There are **less restrictive alternatives** to complete prohibition. The town of St. Peters, Missouri, for example, has passed a local ordinance limiting *Salvia divinorum* sales to adults aged 18 and over.

[Salvia Divinorum Action Center](#)

For the latest updates on *Salvia divinorum's* legal status, please visit our [Salvia Divinorum Action Center](#), and subscribe to our top news e-mail service (see above left).

[Please donate to the Salvia Divinorum Defense Fund](#)