



*The Voice of the Global Methanol Industry*

### **Statement by the Methanol Institute on Bootleg Alcohol Poisoning**

(Singapore, February 10, 2015) As the trade association for the global methanol industry, the members of the Methanol Institute (MI) are saddened by the recent incident of methanol poisoning reported in the media. Ultimately, we expect that the investigations will place the blame on the illegal manufacturing and distribution of contaminated alcoholic beverages. Unfortunately, as we have seen these incidents can have serious consequences leading to injury and loss of life, and are largely preventable with proper enforcement and consumer education.

Methanol – also known as ‘wood alcohol’ – is an industrial chemical used as a building block for hundreds of products that touch our daily lives, from building materials and car parts, to plastics and paints. Ethanol or ‘grain alcohol’ is used in alcoholic beverages meant for human consumption.

Unfortunately, methanol is sometimes deliberately added to alcoholic beverages by unscrupulous and illegal criminal enterprises as a cheaper alternative to producing ethanol. In other cases, the problem stems from the poor distillation of homemade alcohol, through which distilled portions containing high methanol content are produced and not discarded.

Methanol is toxic and drinking just 25-90 ml (0.7-3.0 oz) of methanol can be fatal without proper medical treatment. After consumption, methanol is converted into formaldehyde and then into formic acid, which causes the blood to become acidic (metabolic acidosis). Once acid levels in the blood become elevated, more drastic measures must be taken to purify the blood. Symptoms usually do not occur until about 12 to 24 hours after consumption. In addition to inebriation, symptoms of methanol poisoning can include: abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting; dizziness, headache, or weakness; breathing difficulty or shortness of breath; blindness, blurred vision, or dilated pupils; and seizures.

Methanol poisoning can be treated if diagnosed within 10 to 30 hours of ingestion. Methanol is naturally removed through the breath or urine, but these are slow processes. Removal of methanol can be improved by dialysis. In a hospital setting, fomepizole can be injected as an antidote to methanol poisoning by inhibiting methanol metabolism, while high doses of ethanol can have a similar effect, although much less efficiently. Additionally, administration of sodium bicarbonate can neutralize formic acid and maintain proper pH balance.

Globally, nearly 100 million metric tons of methanol are safely produced, shipped and used in industrial settings each year. The safe handling of methanol is “Job Number 1” for our members, and we strongly condemn the illegal use of methanol in alcoholic beverages. The Methanol Institute is leading efforts to prevent bootleg alcohol poisoning, and more information can be found on the “Health and Safety” section of our web site at [www.methanol.org](http://www.methanol.org).

**Contact:** Gregory Dolan, CEO, Methanol Institute, [gdolan@methanol.org](mailto:gdolan@methanol.org) or +1 703 248 3636.

**Singapore:** 10 Anson Road, #32-10 International Plaza, Singapore 079903 +65 6325 6300

**Washington:** 225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 205, Alexandria, VA 22314 USA +01 703 248 3636

**Brussels:** Avenue Jules Bordet, 1421140 Brussels, Belgium +32 276 116 59

**Beijing:** #511, Pacific Sci-tech Development Center, Peking University, No. 52 Hai Dian Rd, Beijing 100871, China +86 10 6275 5984

[www.methanol.org](http://www.methanol.org)

[www.methanol.org.cn](http://www.methanol.org.cn)

[www.methanolfuels.org](http://www.methanolfuels.org)