

Comprehensive LC-QTOF-MS Analysis for NPS in a Complex Forensic Toxicology World

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DISCLOSURES

- I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.
- I am a scientist and employee of FRFF / CFSRE, a 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational facility.
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 - The opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.





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INTRODUCTION

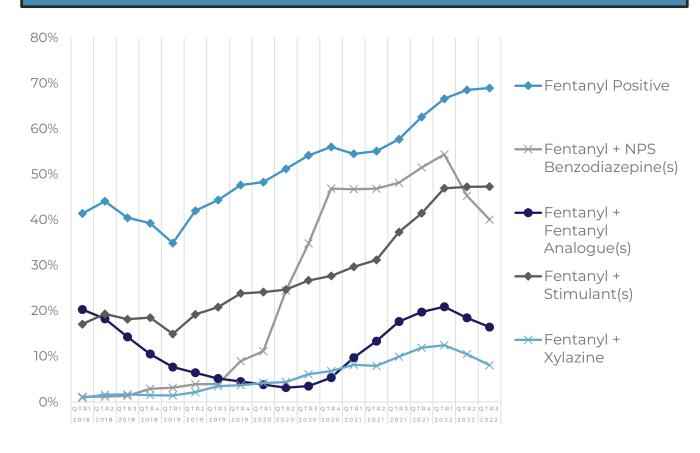




COMPLEX FORENSIC TOXICOLOGY WORLD

- Dynamic and volatile drug markets
- Increasing polydrug use
 - Single drug intoxications are becoming more rare
- Scopes of testing are being strained due to evolving drug markets
- Forensic toxicologists are being asked to interpret complex cases now more than ever

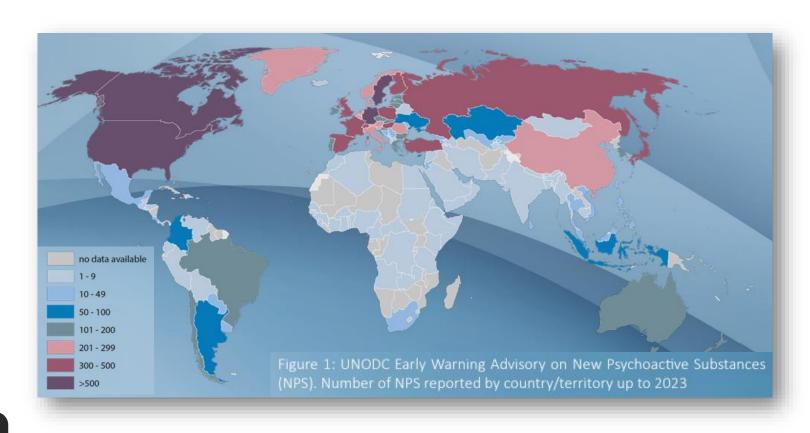
Fentanyl Co-Positivity ("Nested Waves")





WHAT ARE "NPS"?

- Novel (or new) psychoactive substances (NPS) is a catch-all term that captures most drugs outside traditional and therapeutic categories, also referred to as "designer drugs"
 - Newly synthesized or discovered
 - New to the drug supply
 - Used in a new way or manner
 - Altered toxicological effect profile
- Five major subclasses of NPS
 - Benzodiazepines
 - Opioids
 - Stimulants
 - Hallucinogens
 - Cannabinoids



WHY ARE NPS POPULAR?

Consumers

- New highs / more desirable effects
- Easier to source than tradition drugs
- Legal status (or avoid illegal status)
- Beat traditional drug tests

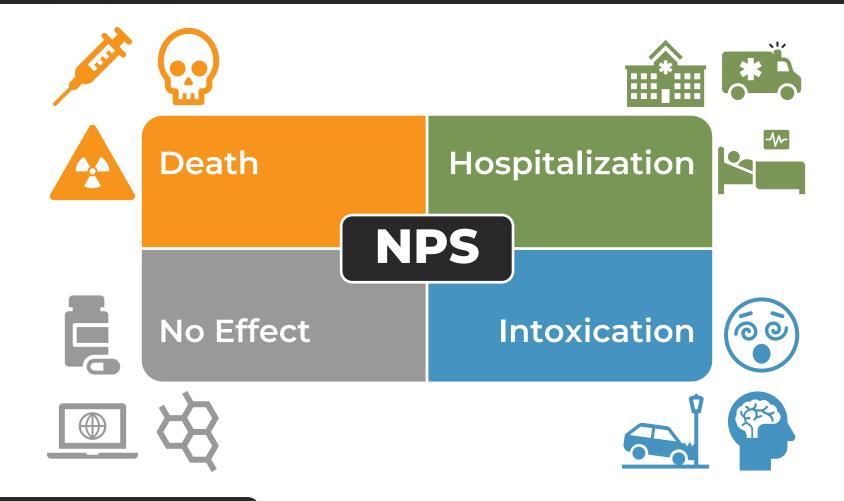
"Manufacturers" / Processers

- Cheaper alternatives
- Desirable combined drug effects
- Legal status (or avoid illegal status)



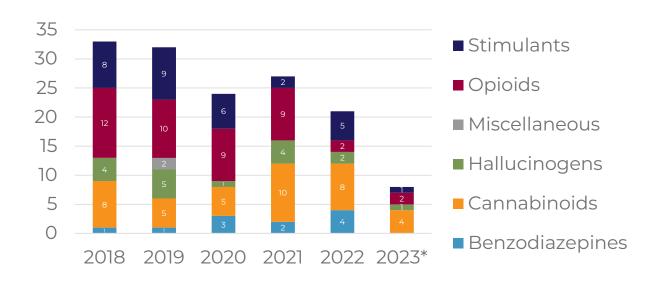
NPS are often unknown to consumer / processors

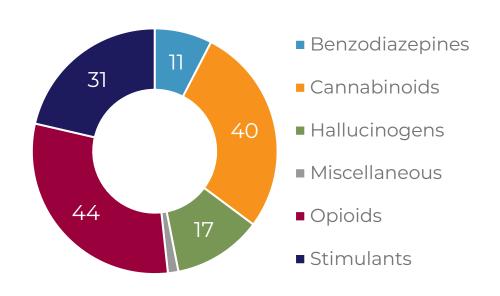
WHERE DO NPS APPEAR?



EMERGENCE OF NPS IN THE U.S.

- Since 2018, NPS Discovery has reported 145 newly discovered NPS (and counting)
- NPS opioids remain the largest subclass of newly emerging drugs encountered
- As of June 2023, NPS Discovery has reported 8 NPS for the first time this year





LANDSCAPE OF NPS IN THE U.S.

- Since 2018, NPS Discovery has identified more than 225 NPS in forensic samples
- NPS opioids, stimulants, and cannabinoids represent the largest subclasses observed

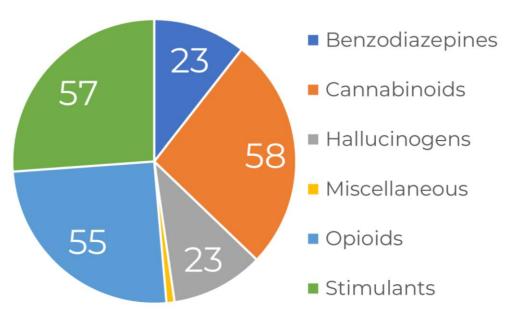
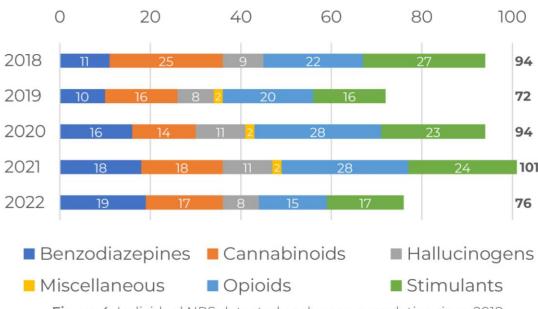


Figure 3: Breakdown by subclass of individual NPS detected, 2018-2022.





WORKFLOWS & METHODS





FORENSIC LABORATORY

- The Center for Forensic Science Research and Education (CFSRE)
 - 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational facility
 - Surveillance & Casework





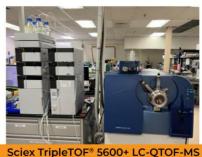






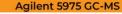
















Sample Preparation

Chromatography

Mass Spectrometry

Data Processing

Basic Liquid-Liquid Extraction

 Broad-based drug screening for NPS (excluding synthetic cannabinoids)

Procedure:

- Add 1 mL of Borax buffer, pH 10.4
- Add 3 mL of 70:30 N-butyl chloride and ethyl acetate
- Cap and rotate for 10 mins at 40%
- Centrifuge 4600 rpm for 15 minutes
- Freeze pour and transfer supernatant
- Drydown in TurboVap at 35 °C, 10 psi, for 30 mins
- Reconstitute for LC-MS analysis

Acidic Liquid-Liquid Extraction

 Capture synthetic cannabinoids, their metabolites, and other acidic drugs

Procedure:

- Add 1 mL of 5% phosphoric acid in water (v:v)
- Add 3 mL of 80:10:10 hexane, EtOAc, and MTBE
- Cap and rotate for 10 mins at 40%
- Centrifuge 4600 rpm for 15 minutes
- Freeze pour and transfer supernatant
- Drydown in TurboVap at 35 °C, 10 psi, for 30 mins
- Reconstitute for LC-MS analysis



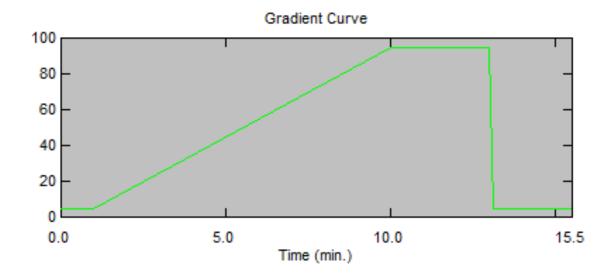
Sample Preparation

Chromatography

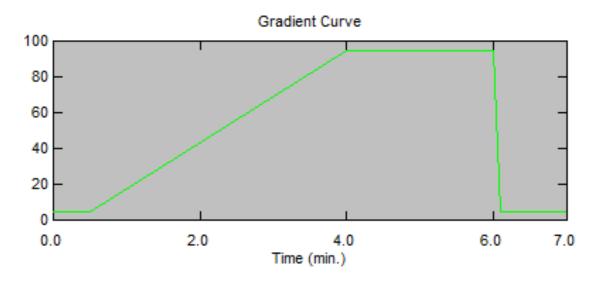
Mass Spectrometry

Data Processing

15.5-minute General Screening Method



7-minute Synthetic Cannabinoid Method



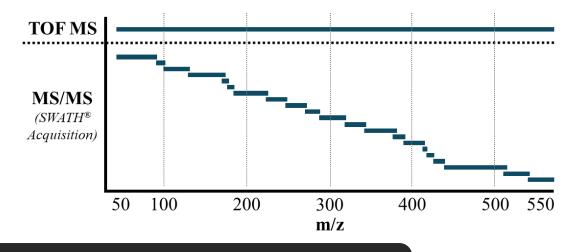
Sample Preparation

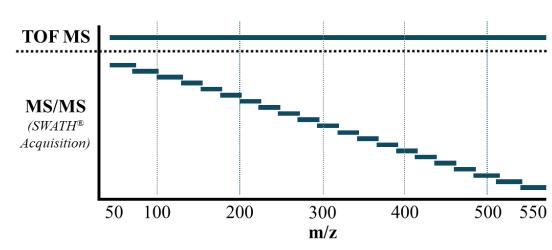
Chromatography

Mass Spectrometry

Data Processing

- Liquid chromatography quadrupole time-of-flight mass spectrometry (LC-QTOF-MS)
- Information Dependent Acquisition (IDA)
- SWATH Acquisition (DIA) Primarily Used







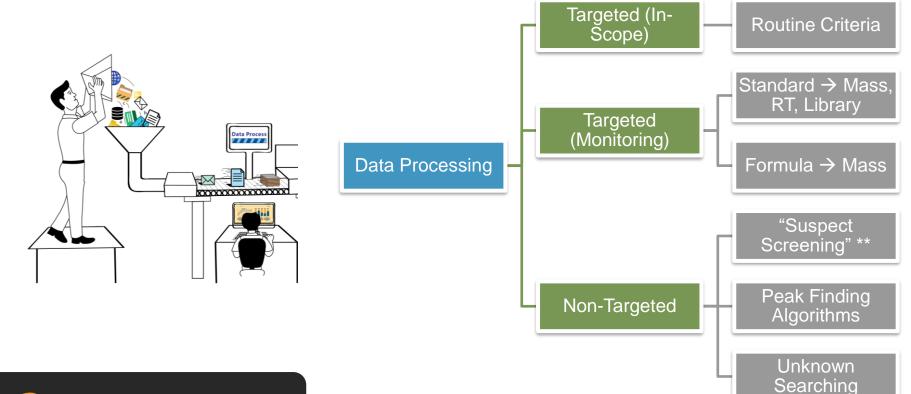


Sample Preparation

Chromatography

Mass Spectrometry

Data Processing





WORKFLOWS TO DISCOVERY NEW NPS

Sample-Mining (Prospective):

- Use of discarded authentic sample extract vials
- High-ish volume, higher rate of incidence
- Best for trend data

Data-Mining (Retrospective):

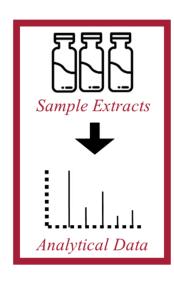
- Use of electronic mass spectrometry datafiles
- Gives historical perspective
- Not ideal way to discover NPS

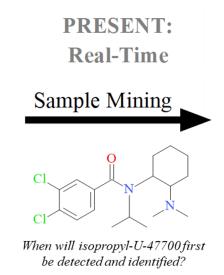
Data Mining Cl When was U-47700 first

detected but not identified?

PAST:

Retrospective





Real-Time Surveillance / Case Analysis:

- Extraction and analysis of biological samples from forensic investigations
- Individual case basis but often can give insights into trending information

EXAMPLES OF NEW DISCOVERIES

■ Important → Assessing the right populations paired with good intelligence

Toxicology:

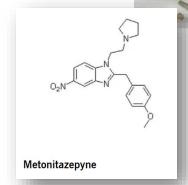
- Collaboration with medical examiner / coroner offices -> Assist in determining MOD and COD
- Initial toxicology testing negative but "suspected opioid death"

Drug Material:

- Plant-like material submitted from PDPH / contained peak not in library database
- Structural elucidation → new synthetic cannabinoid: ADB-5'Br-BINACA

• Intelligence:

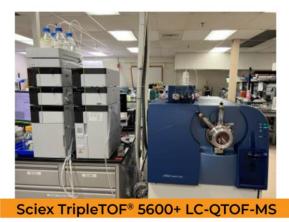
- Monitor online surface web gray market sites → new nitazene analogues
- Purchase to confirm identity before first forensic case???

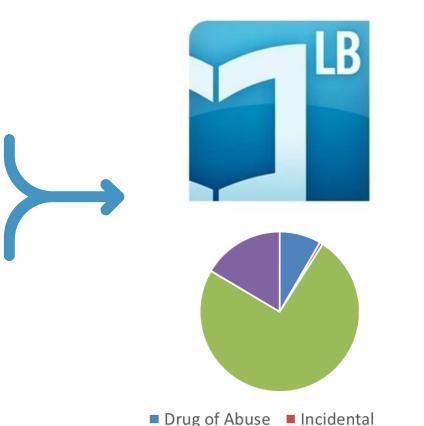


CONTINUAL DEVELOPMENT OF DATABASE









NPS



Pharmaceutical



EXAMPLE OF NPS IDENTIFICATIONS





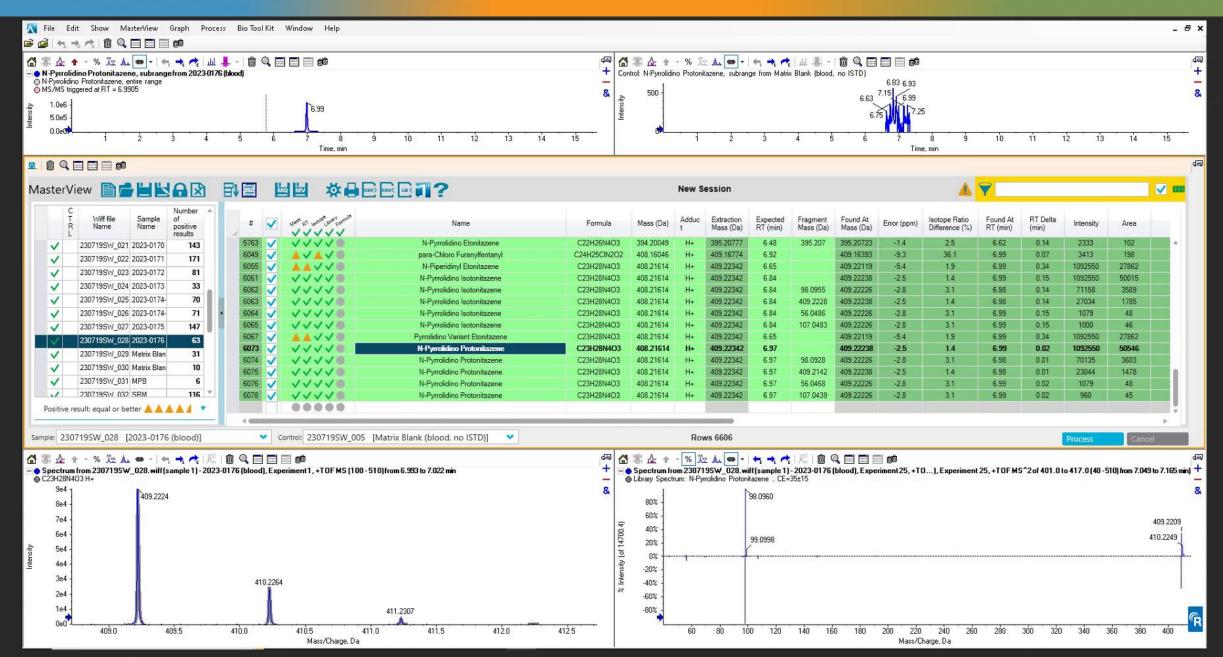




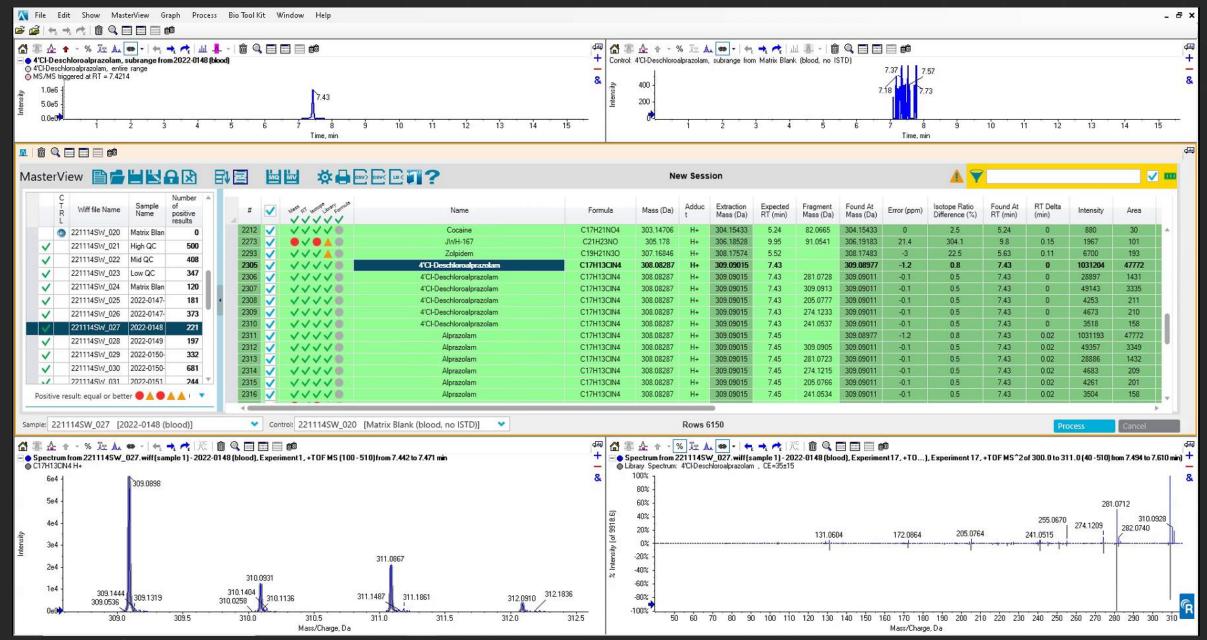


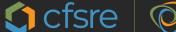


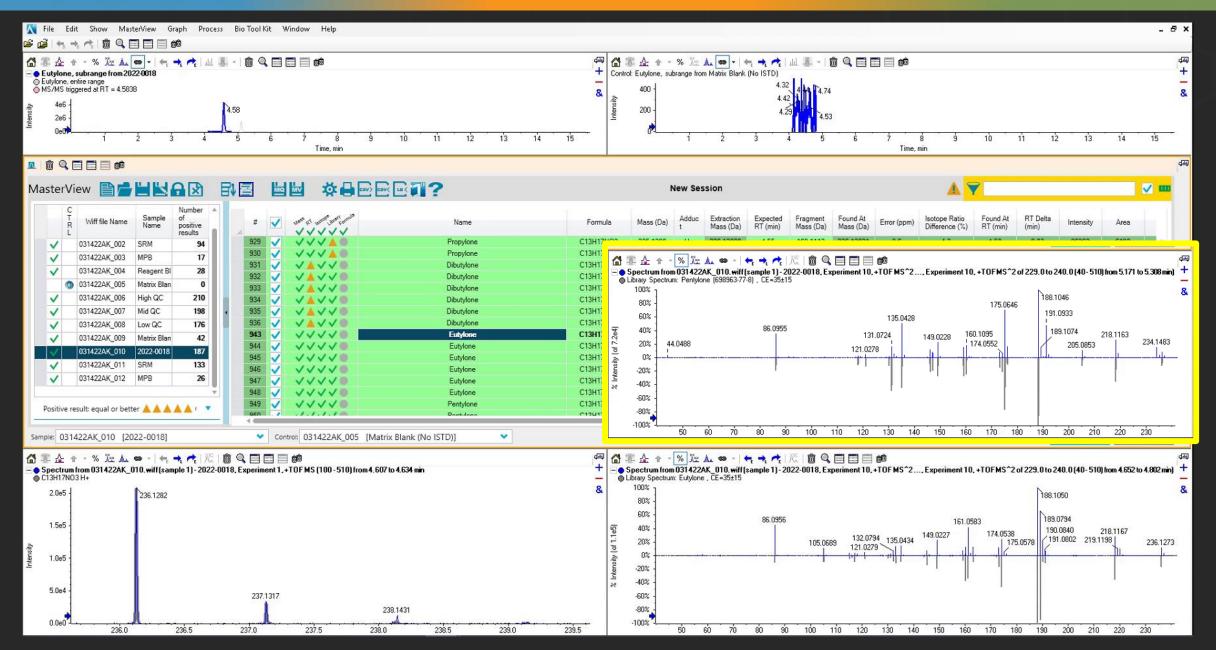




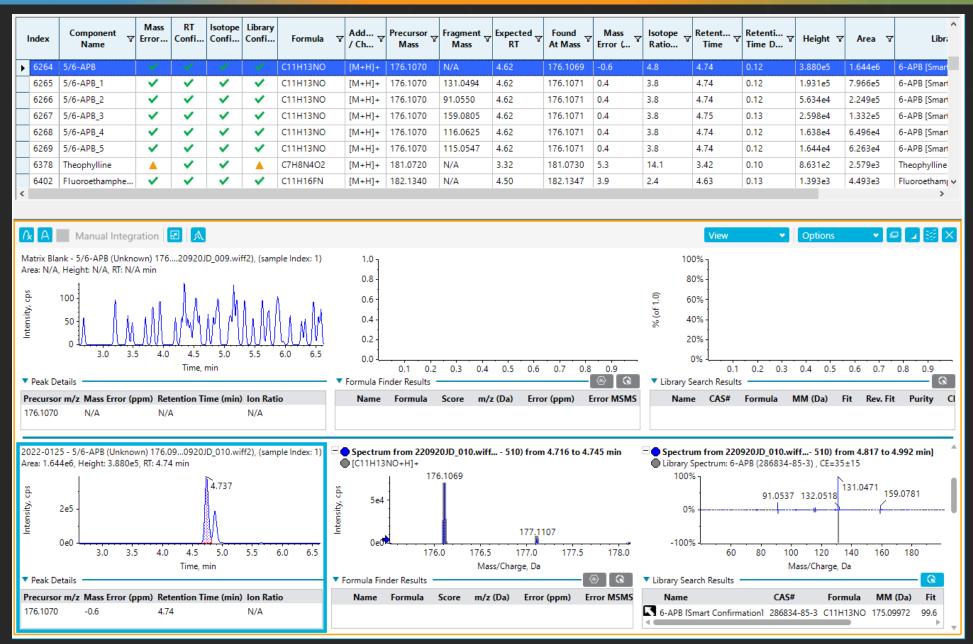














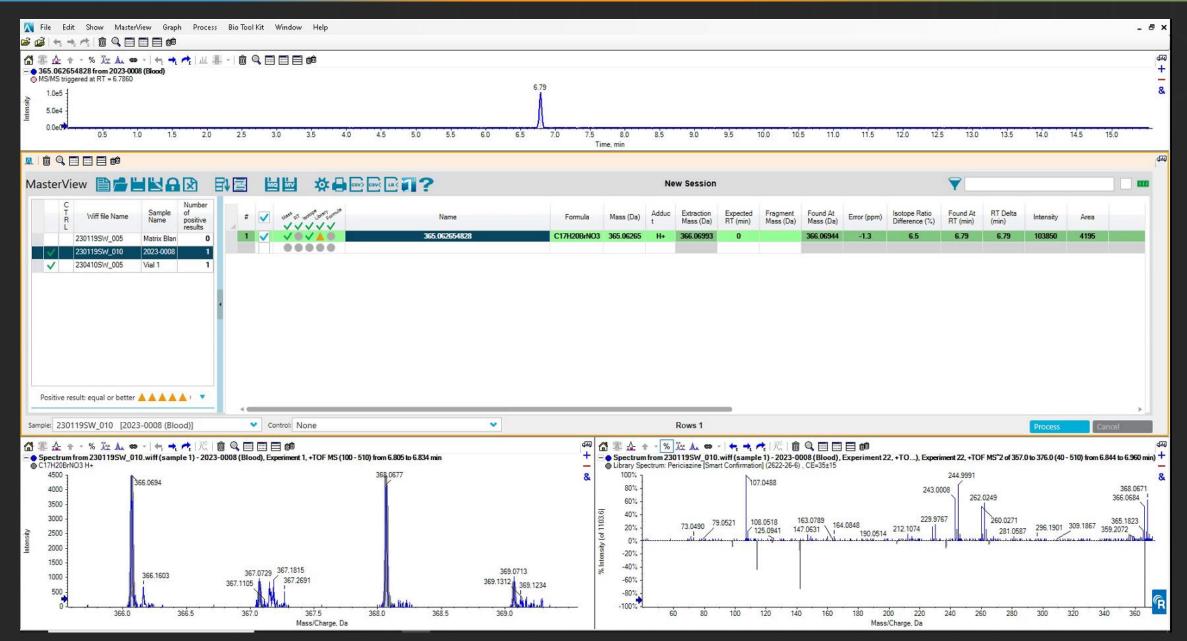




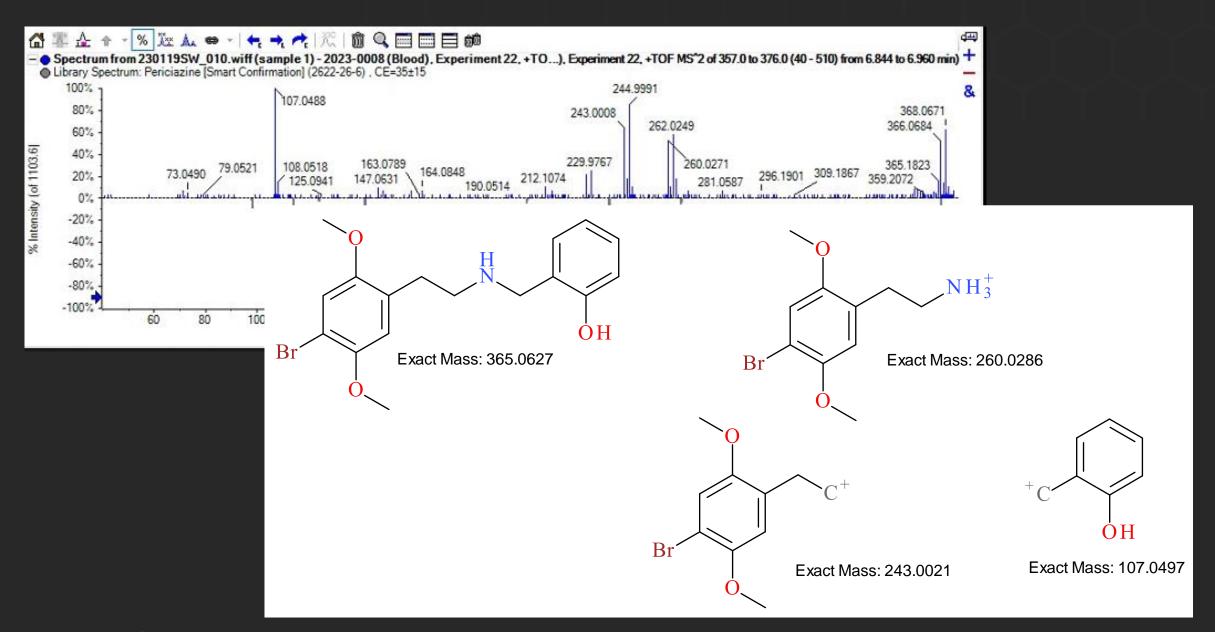
EXAMPLE OF "TRUE" UNKNOWNS

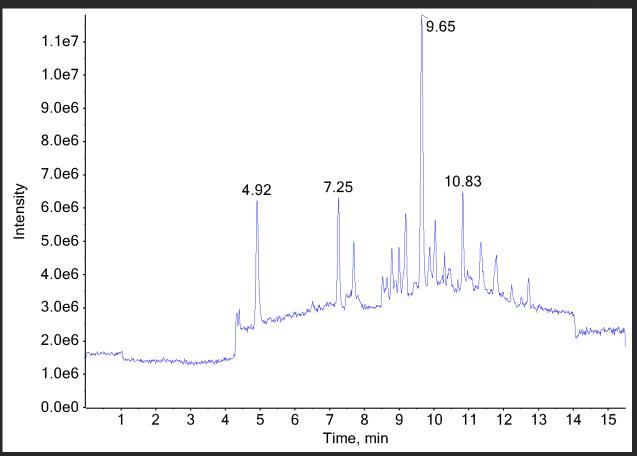


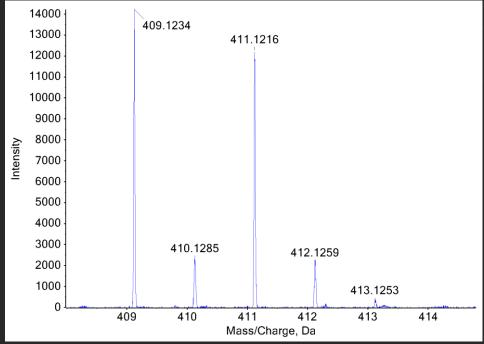


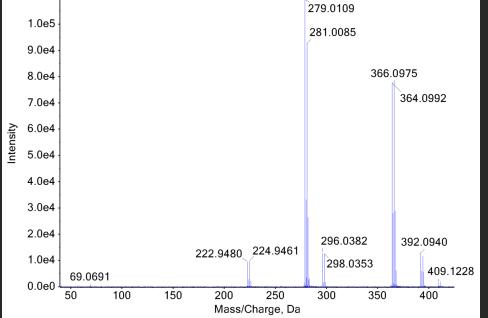




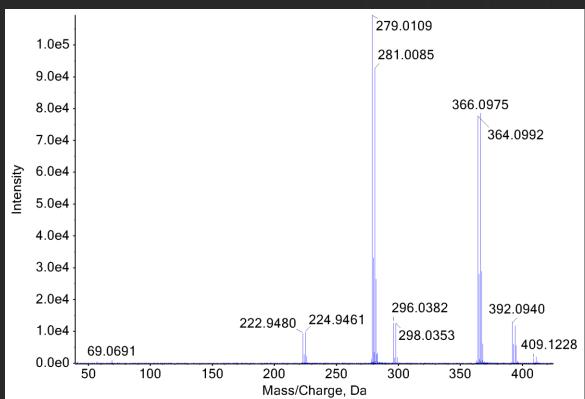


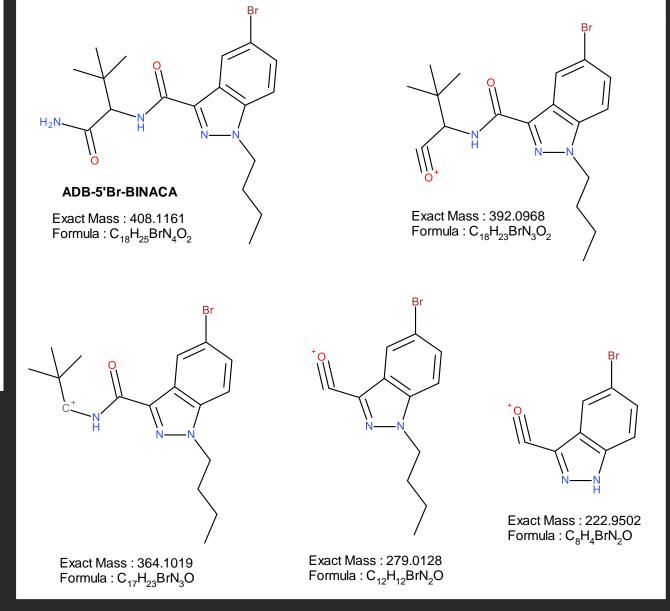












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THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?



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