

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein
“The Dangers of Synthetic Cannabinoids and Stimulants”

April 6, 2011

We are here today because there is an alarming, growing trend of abuse of synthetic marijuana and other dangerous stimulants.

Across the country, poison control centers are receiving more and more reports of abuse of synthetic cannabinoids and stimulants that are chemically produced to mimic the active ingredients in drugs such as marijuana and methamphetamine.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers has noted that centers nationally received 2,882 calls about synthetic marijuana in 2010, up from a reported 14 calls in 2009.

Disturbingly, the primary users of these dangerous synthetic substances are youth who purchase the substances online or in gas stations, convenience stores and smoke shops. The substances are often sold as herbal incense, and marketed as “Spice” and “K2.” They come in flavors such as watermelon, lemon-lime, blueberry, and mango.

While synthetic cannabinoids may be used with the intention of getting a marijuana-like high, the true effects are not yet known. Some reported effects include nausea, increased agitation, elevated blood pressure, and racing heart rates. Tragically, synthetic marijuana has been blamed for the fatality of at least one young man, David Rozga, whose father has courageously joined us here today.

I am pleased that over 20 states have banned chemical substances contained in synthetic cannabinoids. The United States military has also banned personnel from possessing or using these substances.

On March 1st, 2011, the Drug Enforcement Administration used its temporary scheduling authority to place five synthetic cannabinoids as Schedule I substances under the Controlled Substances Act. This means that K2 and Spice products currently **cannot** legally be sold in the United States.

However, this scheduling is only temporary. A bill Senator Grassley and I introduced, the *Dangerous Synthetic Drug Control Act of 2011*, would permanently schedule 15 of the source chemicals the Drug Enforcement Administration has identified within K2 and similar products and place them as Schedule I narcotics under the Controlled Substances Act with other dangerous drugs.

Unfortunately, synthetic marijuana is not the only new, dangerous substance on the market. Reports of people ingesting certain bath salts as drugs also have increased dramatically. In 2010, poison control centers across the United States received 301 calls about bath salts. As you can see in the chart I have here, from January 1st to March 30th, 2011, they have seen an incredible increase in the number of cases- reportedly receiving 1,381 calls about bath salts.

These stimulants can be smoked, injected or snorted. Some say their effects can be as powerful as methamphetamine. Bath salts are sold online and in retail stores, and reports show that youth may be the primary consumers.

Although there is not sufficient data to understand exactly how prevalent the use of these stimulants is, we know that in some cases, they have been very dangerous. One man, Neil Brown, of Mississippi got high on bath salts and used a skinning knife to slit his face and stomach repeatedly.

Doctors and clinicians at poison centers have indicated that ingesting “bath salts” containing synthetic stimulants can cause side effects such as chest pains, elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate, agitation, hallucinations, panic attacks, extreme paranoia, delusions, and even sleep deprivation-induced psychosis.

Synthetic cannabinoids and stimulants are especially problematic, because as we know from the University of Michigan’s annual Monitoring the Future Survey, perceptions of harm and danger tend to drive down the use of specific substances among youth. In other words, if a youth believes a drug is dangerous, they are less likely to use it. With so little known about new synthetic substances, drug use is likely to increase.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about the most effective ways to curb these dangerous new drugs and protect our youth. I also hope our witnesses can provide us with guidance on how we can stay ahead of emerging, dangerous substances. I have been in public office long enough to know that K2, Spice and bath salts will not be the last substances that traffickers make available to our youth. We must do all we can to stay ahead of the producers of these dangerous drugs.

I now turn to my Co-Chairman, Senator Grassley, for his opening statement.

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