

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHARLES E. GRASSLEY
SENATE CAUCUS ON INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL
"THE DANGERS OF SYNTHETIC CANNABINOIDS AND STIMULANTS"

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6, 2011

Madam Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing to address a new and dangerous drug abuse trend. Drugs disguised and marketed as harmless products such as incense, bath salts or even plant food are rapidly gaining in popularity among America's youth. These products are combined with powerful and potent synthetic drugs and stimulants that reportedly mimic the effects of other dangerous and illegal drugs. These drugs have been sold in mainstream convenience stores, shopping malls, gas stations, and on several internet websites. Popular brand names for these products include: "K2," "Spice," "Ivory Wave," "Red Dove," and "Vanilla Sky" among many others. According to several news reports, many people who use these products often cite the fact that they can get these products easily by going to the nearest store or simply purchasing them online. The ease with which these products are available and the fact that they are not completely banned in this country may lead users to believe that using these products is nothing more than harmless fun. It is now clear that using these products is anything but harmless.

According to a statement from Dr. Anthony Scalzo, who is the Medical Director of the Missouri Poison Center and Director of Toxicology at Saint Louis University, these products cause serious health effects including symptoms such as: racing heart beat, elevated blood pressure, hallucinations, anxiety, agitation and significant delusions and paranoia. Dr. Scalzo also describes cases where patients have become dependent on these drugs and where users have seriously harmed themselves, committed crimes, and harmed others while high on these substances.

Dr. Scalzo also adds that U.S. poison control centers are reporting skyrocketing calls regarding these drugs. According to Dr. Scalzo's statement, poison centers reported over 2,800 calls concerning synthetic marijuana known as "K2" or "Spice." As of March 22nd, there have already been over 1,200 calls to poison control centers concerning synthetic marijuana products this year alone. That means we're on pace to have over 4,800 calls for 2011, which would be nearly a 60% increase. Further, poison control centers have taken over 1,200 calls so far this year concerning "bath salts" use. This is more than a 400% increase from all calls received concerning "bath salts" in 2010. These numbers don't paint the whole picture of the extent of the use of these products, but they do illustrate that more people are using these products and experiencing serious effects. I ask unanimous consent that Dr. Scalzo's full statement be made part of today's record.

The armed forces are also experiencing increasing cases of synthetic drug use. It was with sadness and concern that I recently read about K2 being used by members in the armed services and at the service academies. According to a recent article in the *Navy Times*, 16 sailors serving on the U.S.S. Bataan were recently discharged for using "Spice." The U.S.S. Bataan has since been deployed to Libya short these sailors. The article further states that 151 sailors Navy-wide had been accused of using or caught with "Spice" over the last four months. The U.S.

Naval Academy also recently expelled at least 7 midshipmen for using or selling “Spice.” The use of these drugs among our men and women serving in the armed forces is especially concerning from an operational and readiness standpoint while our armed services are still engaged in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beginning operations in Libya.

According to various news articles across the nation, synthetic drug use can cause serious erratic and criminal behavior. In Mooresville, Indiana police arrested a group of teens after they were connected to a string of burglaries while high on K2. Another case in Honolulu, Hawaii shows police arrested a 23-year-old man after he tried to throw his girlfriend off an 11th floor balcony after smoking K2. A 14 year-old boy in Missouri nearly threw himself out of a 5th story window after smoking K2. Once the teen got over his high he denied having any suicidal intentions. Doctors believe he was hallucinating at the time of this incident.

Synthetic drug use also has deadly consequences. This past June a young constituent of mine, named David Rozga who is pictured behind me, was a recent graduate of Indianola High School in Indianola, Iowa. David committed suicide shortly after smoking a packet of “K2.” David and his friends purchased “K2” at an area shopping mall thinking it could not have been dangerous if you could get it at the mall. David’s family is here today and we will soon be hearing from his father, Michael Rozga, about David’s life and his tragic death. David Rozga may have been the first person in the U.S. to have died from using these products, but tragically he has not been the last.

News articles from across the country are reporting deaths as a result of synthetic drug use. A month after David’s tragic death police report that, a 28-year-old Middletown, Indiana mother of two passed away after smoking a lethal dose of K2. This woman’s godson reported that anyone could get K2 easily because it can be sold to anybody at any price at any time. This last August, a recent 19-year-old Lake Highlands High School graduate in Dallas, Texas passed away after smoking K2. The medical examiner confirmed that this boy had K2 in his system at the time of his death. A man in Louisiana slit his throat and shot himself while hallucinating on “bath salts” last year. Another case in Louisiana occurred last year when a 21-year-old man suffered for three days after smoking “bath salts.” This man slit his throat while hallucinating. Although he missed major arteries he was still under the influence of the drug. When his dad, who was a medical doctor and treating him, fell asleep his son went into another room and shot himself. Even more disturbing is the involvement of synthetic drugs in a recent school shooting that occurred in Omaha, Nebraska last January. Robert Butler Jr. shot and killed himself and Dr. Vicki Kaspar, the assistant principal at the school. Doctors have confirmed that Robert Butler had K2 in his system at the time of the shooting.

These incidents I’ve described only scratch the surface of the growing abuse and tragedy synthetic drugs are having on this nation. All of us on this panel are deeply concerned about the continued availability of these drugs. Chairman Feinstein and I recently introduced legislation, named after David Rozga, to ban the chemical compounds the DEA has identified within K2/Spice products. The legislation will also amend the Controlled Substances Act, doubling the timeframe the DEA and the Department of Health and Human Services have to emergency schedule substances from 18 months to 36 months. This will allow for dangerous substances to be quickly removed from the market while being studied for permanent scheduling. Senator Schumer

and Representative Dent of Pennsylvania have also introduced legislation to schedule synthetic drugs like “bath salts” and other products.

Madam Chairman, you and I have worked closely together on many issues especially when it comes to illegal drugs. I really appreciate your efforts in joining me to ensure these dangerous drugs are removed from our society. I look forward to hearing the testimony from the witnesses and to the opportunity to question them about ways we can strengthen our efforts to eradicate these drugs. Thank you.