



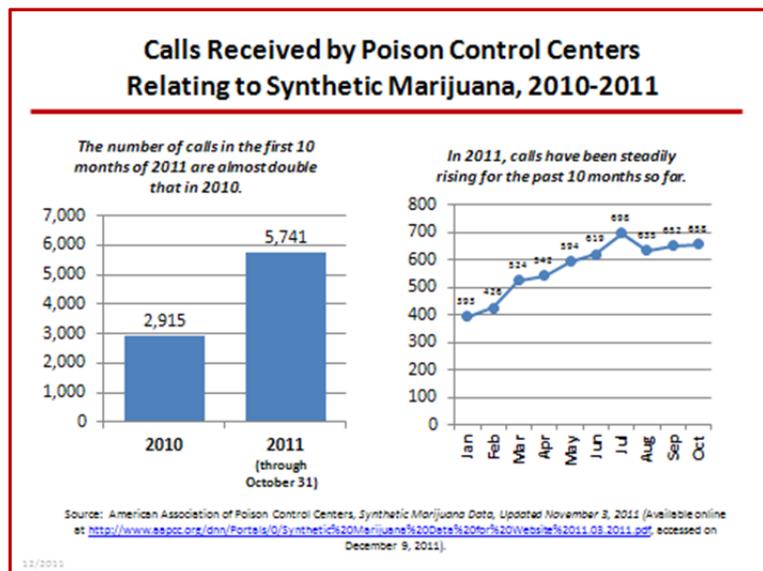
Synthetic Marijuana

Overview and History

- Spice, K2, and other synthetic marijuana products are often sold in legal retail outlets as “herbal incense” and labeled “not for human consumption” to mask their intended purpose and avoid FDA regulatory oversight of the manufacturing process.
- These products consist of plant material that has been laced with substances (synthetic cannabinoids) that claim to mimic Δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive active ingredient in marijuana, and are marketed toward young people as a “legal” high.
- Use of synthetic marijuana has increased significantly. According to data from the 2011 Monitoring the Future study of youth drug-use trends, 11.4 percent of 12th graders used Spice or K2 in the past year.
- The Administration has been working over the past 24 months with Federal, congressional, state, local, and non-governmental partners to put policies and legislation in place to address this issue, and to get the word out to communities across the country about the tremendous health risk posed by these substances.

A Rapidly Emerging Threat

- According to Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) forensic laboratory reports, the initial appearance of synthetic cannabinoids in herbal incense products in the United States occurred in November 2008, when U.S. Customs and Border Protection first encountered products such as “Spice.”
- Prior to arriving in the U.S. market, synthetic cannabinoids were marketed as herbal incense products in several European countries. After experiencing numerous health-related incidents, some European countries banned these products and chemicals. However, recent meetings between ONDCP and EU officials indicate that these substances continue to be a problem in Europe.



ONDCP seeks to foster healthy individuals and safe communities by effectively leading the Nation's effort to reduce drug use and its consequences.

- According to data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers, 2,915 calls were received relating to synthetic marijuana in 2010, and 5,741 calls were received in 2011 as of October 31 (see chart, page 1). Poison control calls have increased nearly every month for the past ten months.

Risk to the Public Health

- Health warnings have been issued by numerous State and local public health departments and poison control centers describing the adverse health effects associated with the use of synthetic cannabinoids and their related products. These effects include agitation, anxiety, nausea, vomiting, tachycardia (fast, racing heartbeat), elevated blood pressure, tremor, seizures, hallucinations, and paranoid behavior.
- Case reports describe psychotic episodes, withdrawal, and dependence associated with the use of synthetic cannabinoids similar to syndromes observed in marijuana use. First responders report that individuals using these substances have suffered from intense hallucinations.

Sources and Continuing Availability

- According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, synthetic cannabinoids and related products appear to originate from foreign sources and are manufactured in the absence of quality controls and devoid of governmental regulatory oversight.
- Law enforcement personnel have also encountered the manufacture of herbal incense products in such places as residential neighborhoods. These products and associated synthetic cannabinoids are readily accessible via the Internet.
- The large profits from sales, plus the fact that these chemicals can be easily synthesized to stay one step ahead of control, indicate there is little incentive to stop retail distribution of synthetic cannabinoid products under the current statutory and regulatory scheme.

Government Efforts to Ban Synthetic Marijuana Products

- The DEA and state drug control agencies have recognized the need to monitor and, when necessary, control these chemicals. The Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 amends the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) to allow the Attorney General to place a substance temporarily in Schedule I when it is necessary to avoid an imminent hazard to the public safety (21 U.S.C. § 811(h)).
- In March 2011, five synthetic cannabinoids were temporarily categorized as Schedule I substances under the CSA. Unless permanently controlled, the ban on these five substances is set to expire in March 2012, although it could be extended for an additional 6 months.
- At least 38 states have taken action to control one or more of these chemicals. Prior to 2010, synthetic cannabinoids were not controlled by any state or at the Federal level.
- Congress has taken some important initial steps to ban many of these substances, and the Administration has sought to support their efforts.
- The *Synthetic Drug Control Act* (HR 1254) was approved by the House of Representatives on December 8, 2011. The Department of Justice has issued a “views letter” in support of the Act.
- In the Senate, several pieces of legislation concerning synthetic drugs are pending, including one that deals specifically with synthetic cannabinoids.

Resources

- Drug Policy Information: <http://www.WhiteHouse.gov/ondcp>
- Drug Enforcement Administration: <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr030111.html>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts/Spice.html>
- American Association of Poison Control Centers: <http://www.aapcc.org/dnn/default.aspx>
- Congressional Research Service: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42066.pdf>

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