



November 10, 2011

MADIGAN CONVENES EMERGENCY SUMMIT ON SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Attorney General Meets with DEA, Law Enforcement, Hospitals, Municipalities, Educators and Parents to Combat Emergence of Synthetic Substance Abuse

Springfield — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today convened an emergency summit in Springfield to address the rising number of young people using chemically-laced substances akin to marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine that are sold over the counter at convenience stores, gas stations and tobacco shops all across Illinois. Madigan's summit brought together the state's top authorities to address this alarming trend that is responsible for growing numbers of injuries and deaths in Illinois and across the country.

"The fact that anyone can walk into a store and purchase synthetic drugs gives teens and young adults the illusion that these substances are safe," Attorney General Madigan said. "We're hosting this emergency summit on synthetic drugs to raise awareness of how dangerous these drugs are, how widespread this problem is and to formulate a coordinated, statewide response to fight back."

The Attorney General's emergency summit included federal, state, county and local law enforcement, educators, health care professionals and parents. It is the first statewide event aimed at increasing awareness of synthetic drugs and identifying solutions to limit access to the extremely dangerous substances.

Synthetic drugs are divided into two categories based on their chemical make-up:

- Cannabinoids, popularly known as K2 or Spice, which contain chemical compounds designed to mimic the effects of THC; and
- Cathinones, known as "bath salts," which contain chemical compounds to mimic the effects of cocaine or meth.

Though the drugs' packaging often states the products are not intended for human consumption, their design, labeling and marketing clearly allude to the product being smoked and inhaled.

Madigan said the drugs are extremely dangerous in that buyers don't know what chemicals they are ingesting. Individual products can contain a vast range of different chemical formulations and potencies, some of which can be two to 500 times stronger than THC.

According to the American Association of Poison Control Centers, calls nationwide indicate a dramatic rise in synthetic drug abuse: In 2010, poison control centers received 302 calls about bath salts. This year, centers have already received more than 5,600 reports of bath salt abuse. Synthetic marijuana use is also on the rise. In 2010, there were more than 2,900 calls from around the country to poison control centers, and so far in 2011, there have been more than 5,700.

Illinois communities are experiencing the same upsurge in incidents related to synthetic drug abuse. In June 2011, 19-year-old Max Dobner, of Aurora, Ill., died behind the wheel of a vehicle after reportedly smoking a synthetic cannabinoid product. Max reportedly told a family member before his crash that he had smoked the drug and felt as though he was having a panic attack. He later ran a stop sign, and his vehicle hit a garden wall, propelling the vehicle into a nearby home.

Though states, including Illinois, have implemented bans on specific formulas of synthetic marijuana and bath salts, Madigan said drug makers can easily sidestep the regulations. Manufacturers simply adapt by replacing the strain of a banned synthetic

cannabinoid or cathinone with a newer version that is not yet on the market and not yet known to authorities. This modification process poses further risk to its young users, who are unaware of the risks and reactions new chemicals may cause.

Speaking at Madigan's summit were Karen Dobner, mother of the late Max Dobner, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency Special Agent Scott Albrecht, Tom McNamara of the Southern Illinois Enforcement Group, and Mike Wahl, medical director for the Illinois Poison Control Center.

Attending the event were representatives from Illinois' State Police, Sheriff's Association, Association of Chiefs of Police, State's Attorney's Association, Departments of Public Health, Corrections and Financial and Professional Regulation, Board of Pharmacy, Pharmacists Association, Principal's Association, School Resource Officers Association, Hospital Association, High School Association, Drug Enforcement Officers Association, Alcohol and Drug Dependence Association. Officials from the state's Metropolitan Enforcement Groups, Administrative Office of Illinois Courts, and Illinois' Retail Merchants Association, Municipal League and Probation and Court Services Association and from municipalities and counties around the state also attended.

-30-

[Return to November 2011 Press Releases](#)

